BURY ME DEEP by LEROY YERXA

fantastic ADVENTURES

THE STRANGE MISSION OF
ARTHUR PENDRAN

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VOLUME 6
NUMBER 3

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

IT IS a sad paradox that some of the things that come out of war are good . . . but it seems that there is an inevitable share of good in everything, even in evil. Before we go any farther along the road to dreary platitude, we'll mention two of the good things: new writers, new stories. This issue has both.

OUR lead novel is "The Strange Mission of Arthur Pendran" by a new writer (to our pages), John X. Pollard. We've asked him what the "X" stands for, and he says it's the spot he's on with his first accepted story—yes, there have been rejections. Your editor agrees, only in saying that it is a *good* spot. We believe you'll find this story one of the most fascinating fantasy adventures since A Connecticut Yankee. It's all there . . . Merlin, Excalibur, the Grail, King Arthur; but in a way you've never seen before. We recommend it to your attention during an hour when you are looking for solid entertainment.

ANOTHER new writer is Thorne Lee, who breaks into fantasy for the first time, with a bang, with "The Man Who Lost His Shadow." Here is a yarn that will be remembered a long time, because it has an excellence seldom reached in the field of "fear." It'll tingle your spine and cause your goosepimples to grow large. And as a further recommendation, this same author has sold a really fine mystery novel to our companion magazine, *Mammoth Detective,* as the direct result of his sale to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. You'd be surprised how many people a writer has to please to do that!

WE PRESENT, this issue, a story by Don Wilcox which is different from the sort of thing that made him famous. Therefore, we want your earnest comment on it. We believe it to be fine work, and a good story. It is definitely fantasy, but what kind? It was one of those things we just had to publish no matter how far afield it seemed to be. Every time we did that in Wilcox's case, we wound up with a pleased grin of triumph on our faces. How about "telling us" again?

"BURY ME DEEP" says Leroy Yerxa. That is the title to his contribution this time, and we've taken him literally. About the time we were setting this story up in type, we found reason to reject one of his stories (can you imagine it!) and the shock proved almost more than he could bear. To our utter astonishment, we next heard of him in Milwaukee, trying to get into the army! Very, very fortunately, the medics discovered the wounds on his heart from the cruel barbs of his critics of early years, and he had to come back to us. Welcome back, Leroy—and we didn't mean it at all! We'll buy your stories! Every once in a while, we go contrary to the readers' opinion of your stuff, just to prove to ourselves we're still editor.

WHEN it comes to "ideas we the editors never think of," Richard Casey's "Horn O' Plenty" is one of those. There's something delightful in this utterly silly little tale of an auto horn that . . . but read it yourself, and be delighted.

BERKELEY LIVINGSTON took a pencil . . . literally because that's how he writes, believe it or not . . . and made a fine story out of a very little thing. "The Truthful Pencil" is just what its name implies—and you can easily see how valuable a pencil would be that wrote only the truth.

LEE FRANCIS has a son named Dickie, who once looked at a picture of Hitler in the newspaper and decided he didn't like it. What he did is faithfully described in the story "Hitler's Right Eye." We think you'll get a chuckle out of it, and also a fine little bit of fantasy.

COMPLETING our parade of fiction this month is Helmar Lewis' "Curse Of The Phantom Legion," a little tale about Africa and what happened to a German Legion that stumbled athwart an ancient curse. Sometimes we wonder if modern curses put on the rapists of Europe aren't proving just as effective. Personally we think bombs are a greater curse than spears . . . but both seem to do the job! Judge for yourself in this story.

THE July issue of *Amazing Stories,* oldest science-fantasy magazine in existence, and our favorite sister magazine, features a complete line-up of stories written by fighting men! Not only that, but the articles, fillers, every reader's letter, are by soldiers. Further, the front and back covers are by military men of this war; as are quite a few of the illustrations. Almost 100%, this issue is the work of those men who are performing a full-time

(Concluded on page 8)

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AT ROULETTE
AT THE RACES
WITH GALLOPING
DOMINOES

?

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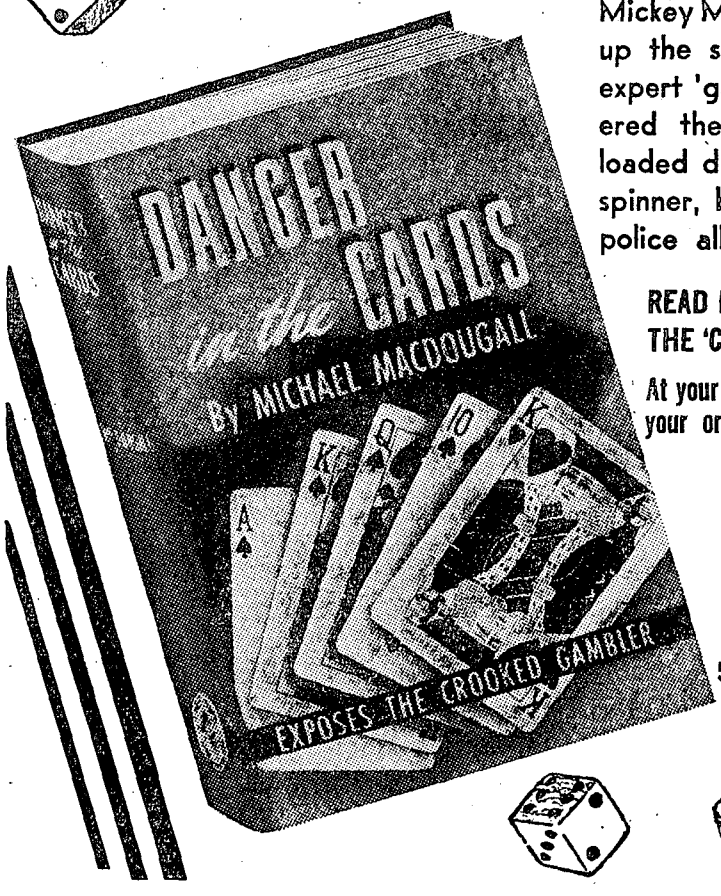

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Concluded from page 6)

job fighting for our liberty, and yet give up some of their "liberty" time to make such an issue possible. There's a great issue to get and keep in honor of a great bunch of boys.

WHILE passing out tips, if you liked Thorne Lee's story in this issue, his mystery novel appears complete in the August issue of *Mammoth Detective,* on the stands May 17. The title is "The Fox And The Hound." 80,000 words of $2.50 novel for two-bits!

FRANK PATTON sends us the startling and pleasing news that the longie he has been working on is another "Doorway To Hell" story! Yes, your editor can no more wait with patience than you can! This story was one of the most popular we ever published, and we'll be tickled to publish another like it!

FOR you novel lovers, we have just purchased a 75,000 word fantasy, by J. W. Pelkie, called "Fruit Of Battle," which we predict will cause a sensation in the fantasy field. It kept us glued to its manuscript pages all during a Sunday afternoon, and wound up in our file of coming good ones on Monday morning—which proves at least one thing: we work on Sundays sometimes!

DON WILCOX has a novel slated for our August issue called "Cats Of Kadenza," which is featured on a cover by J. Allen St. John, which we believe is the finest he has ever done. Wallace West, old master of science fiction classics, comes up, in the same issue, with "The Tanner Of Kiev," one of the most stirring and utterly delightful fantasies to come out of this war. Here is a picture of Russia that will open your eyes—and we guarantee it is a true concept of Russian fantasy.

RECENTLY a reader asked us a question: "Can you give us a list of fantastic and amazing stories of all types which are tops in the past twenty years?" Yes, that knocked us for a loop, as you can well imagine. That's a *large* order. But we *did* give him a partial list. However, our own interest has grown until we'd like to get a collection of opinions by those who *really* know, the readers who have been reading them that long. So how about it, you fantasy lovers? Why not send us *your* list of the best fantasy and science fiction stories you've ever read—from any source at all, not just FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and *Amazing Stories?*

DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN, stationed recently at Salt Lake City, found time to write three fantasy stories for us—which replenishes our supply. We'll dole them out at intervals. And we might say that they'll be treats—Dave's experiences in the Air Force haven't hurt his writing. On the contrary, they seem to have added a certain deep sense of conviction to his every sentence. We'd say here was a lad who had grown mentally in stature. He's *seen* things.

AUTHOR MORRIS J. STEELE reports that he is now a Sgt. and stationed in Africa. Which isn't fantastic—but here is something that is! The first man he met over there was the former assistant editor of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, Cpl. Louis H. Sampliner. Said Sampliner: "It's a small world!" Said Steele: "Take a look at my arm—then remember those rejects!" We have reason to believe a certain Corporal is reconsidering a few manuscripts—under duress!

DON WILCOX has had a nibble from Universal on his "Whispering Gorilla." Recent successes in horror and monster pictures have made the studios "gorilla" conscious. We wish you luck, Don. But we're afraid the re-write men are going to murder one fine story! WG isn't horror, by any means, and if the movie is made anywhere following the original script, it'll be a wow of a drama, but certainly it won't scare anybody. If only *we* were the script writers in this case . . .

WHAT famous author by the same name mentioned in the previous paragraph has a deep, dark secret concerning a literary effort? Come, Don, is it a serious novel? Or a radio show? Or maybe that Children's Book at long last?

THE other day we were talking about the ability of some people to foretell the future. Mrs. Leroy Yerxa was one of the listeners. Just a few days later we discovered she had a contribution to the discussion that would have amazed us—because she had just informed a friend that twin girls would be born to the friend, would weigh approximately six pounds each. One week later twin girls were born, the total weight being thirteen pounds. She explains it now—a dream. Wonder if that's where Leroy gets his plots?

YESTERDAY another O'Brien dropped into the office—yes, it was an uncle, the long lost kind—who proved to be as fantastic as one of his nephew's characters. He specializes in two things: consultant in the rare minerals—the radioactive minerals; forecasts of future events. He predicted to us that the war with Japan would last another five years and that Hitler would be murdered by his own party, which would bring about an early end of the European conflict. We hope he's right about the last—and wrong about the first! Your editor thinks we can lick those lousy little——in a lot less than that. 1800 battle wagons in 1945 in the Pacific won't be a "secret" weapon, but . . . !

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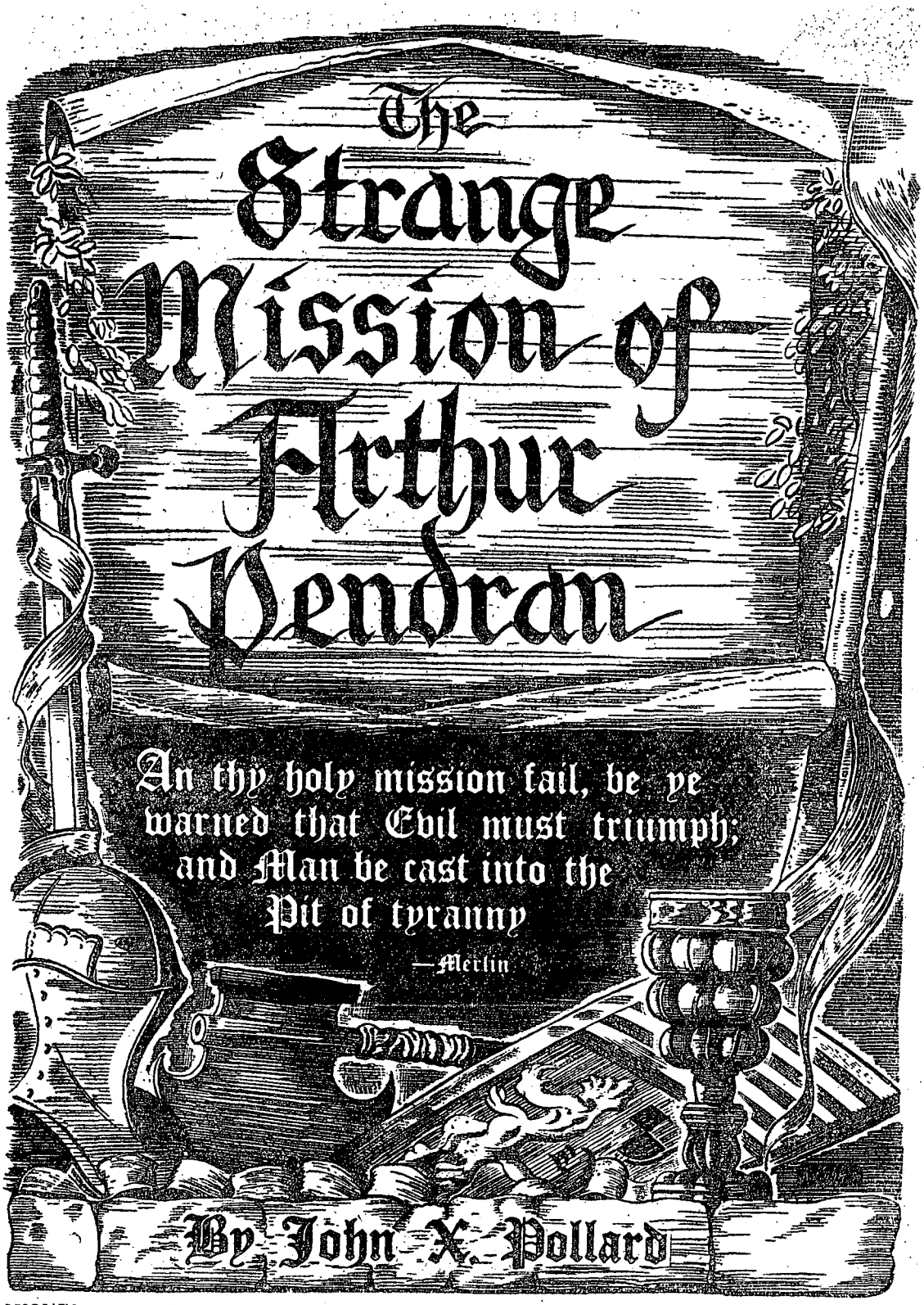

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In the swelling radiance, the Cup appeared to expand . . . to grow . . .

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CHAPTER I

"Curl Up with a Good Book!"

"SORRY, Pendran, but we can't use you."

The red-haired young man standing in front of the desk stared in open-mouthed astonishment at the speaker in the trim white jacket of an Air Corps medico.

"But—but hell's bells, Doc," he sputtered, "I'm a flier! I can fly any crate you ever heard of—and make it do things most of your wing-wearing boys *never* heard of! My credentials are right there on the desk in front of your nose. Why don't you at least look at 'em?"

The young doctor leaned back in his chair and spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"I'm not questioning your ability, Pendran," he said earnestly. "It's just that you're not physically qualified to be a fighter- or bomber-pilot for Uncle Sam's air forces. We're governed by certain inflexible ru——"

"'Physically qualified' my — my foot!" Pendran growled. "I've flown planes ever since I was big enough to crawl into a cockpit. See them?" He pointed a dramatic finger at his own flashing blue eyes. "20-20. Both of 'em." He flexed his arms and swelled his broad chest, still bare from his recent examination by the young man behind the desk, and sinews rippled like snakes under his tanned skin. "That is muscle, Doc: beef, brawn and power. Three years of football at Northwestern put that muscle there." He dealt the left side of his naked chest a jolt with his fist. "And I've got a heart you could *power* a plane with! What more do you guys want?"

The medico tried to be patient. He had gone through scenes similar to this many times before and they always distressed him. He said:

"Look, Pendran, I know exactly how you feel. But there are two things wrong with you that won't let me pass you for pilot service. First, there's that left thumb; that once-broken knuckle is too stiff——"

"Hell, am I supposed to *thumb* 'em to death?"

"—for requirements. Second, you've a tendency to be color-blind—not pronounced, but still present. Of course, Pendran, there are other branches of the Air Force that can use you. Why not——"

Arthur Pendran had the answer before the young doctor could complete the question.

"Because I'm a flier, not a gunner or a bombardier or navigator or instructor or whatever else you have in mind. Either I *fly* a plane in combat or I sit around and wait for my draft board to stick me in the army as a private. There's been a scrap going on in Europe for a year and a half now; and the way things are going, we'll be in it by this fall. The way I see it, the Japs would like to start something but haven't the guts; so they'll probably wait until we get tied up with the Germans before they get too hostile.

"But that's beside the point. Doc, man to man, do you pass me as fit for pilot service, or don't you?

The medico sighed. "Put on your shirt, Pendran—and keep it on. You're a nice guy and I like you. But I won't pass you!"

For a long moment the eyes of the two men held; then, abruptly, the tension and anger left Pendran's expression.

"All right, Doc; no hard feelings." He turned and picked up his undershirt from a chair. "You're the fifth one to turn me down, so I guess the medical profession knows its business."

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He shrugged into his dress shirt, knotted his tie with vicious, jerking movements of his long-fingered, muscular hands, and reached for his suit coat.

"Anyway," he grinned lopsidedly, "there's always the Commandos!"

OUTSIDE the recruiting office, he paused in the brilliant May-day sun flooding Chicago's LaSalle Street and moodily lit a cigarette.

So now what? This was one time he particularly wished he wasn't an orphan—even a fairly wealthy one. The thought of returning to his apartment was suddenly abhorrent. This was no time to be alone with his thoughts. He should call Mary and let her know the result of his latest effort to get into that branch of the service where he would have done the most good; but his disappointment was too fresh, too sensitive, to discuss.

"What I need," he reflected blackly, "is to get damn good and drunk!"

He recalled the tiny, hole-in-the-wall tavern across from the City Hall where he and Sig North occasionally drank a beer or two. Sig had been drafted a month before, and Pendran missed the big Swede.

He threw his half-consumed cigarette into the gutter and moved off along the crowded street, his bared red hair a vivid spot of color among the throng.

The door to Al's Place was opened to the warm air of the late May afternoon. Pendran plodded in, spiritlessly, and found a stool at the far end of the bar. Other than two men talking in low tones over beer glasses at the far end of the bar, the place was deserted. A small radio near the cash register mumbled over a ball game.

The bartender had a thin, precise face behind rimless glasses. He resembled a bank examiner more than anything else. He gave the bar in front of Pendran a flip with his towel and said: "What will it be, sir?"

"Beer," Pendran replied mechanically. . . . "No; wait. Bourbon and seltzer. Don't mix it."

"Yes sir."

FOUR drinks in fairly rapid succession seemed only to deepen his fit of depression. Ten of his twenty-five years had been devoted to airplanes. At fifteen he was a familiar figure to the employees at the Municipal Airport; and he knew most of the pilots—passenger and mail—by their first names. On his sixteenth birthday he had made his first solo flight in a battered trainer, while its owner stood on the ground below clutching his two hundred dollars rental fee and sweating copiously as young Pendran went through loops and barrel-rolls and Immelmans over Chicago's Southwest side.

By the time he graduated from Northwestern, he had designed and built four planes, one of which went to pieces in the air, forcing him to "hit the silk" for the first time. His father, Myles Pendran, the wealthy head of a roller-bearing company, tried mightily to turn young Arthur's interest into less dangerous channels. Then shortly after Arthur's twenty-third birthday, Myles Pendran and his wife died instantly in a head-on automobile collision.

Arthur, after a brief but intense period of grief, went back to his planes and their engines and forgot the rest of the world—with a single exception. That exception was blonde and blue-eyed, five feet two and crazy about flying. Mary Graham was the prettiest stewardess on the Trans-American Airlines roster—no mean accolade considering the potential movie stars and Miss Americas filling such positions.

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He signaled for more bourbon and brightened a bit at the thought of Mary. She was in town now, with a two-day layover; and he'd call her in the morning after the edge of his disappointment had blunted, and maybe they'd fly down to St. Louis and see Hugo and his wife.

But the black veil came down again. Damn it, what was the use? A man spent most of his life developing an interest until he was an expert at it; then when an opportunity came to make use of that knowledge, some technicality blocked him out. It wasn't fair, it was a damned outrage, and by God he was going to get stinking drunk . . .

By the time the bartender had filled his glass for the twelfth time, darkness had come outside. A thin trickle of customers came and left during the hours, but none paid much attention to the red-haired young man drinking himself into a stupor at the end of the bar.

A wavering length of white material climbed onto the stool next to Pendran. He blinked at it with owlish disinterest and let his eyes turn back to their gloomy scrutiny of nothing at all.

"Didn't it work out, Art?"

"Naw," Pendran growled, without looking up from his tenebrous contemplation of his again empty glass. "Thish doc was a nice guy but he wouldn't . . ."

His voice trailed off, and slowly he turned his head toward the occupant of the neighboring stool. "Say, how come you . . . Mary? *Mary!* Well, what d'ya know! You know, I was just . . . How'd you happen to——"

His voice began to rise, and the girl shook her head, smiled, and said:

"I happened to be in the Loop and came in here to use the phone. I saw you sitting back here and thought maybe you'd buy me a drink."

WHICH was a lie—a white lie. Mary Graham was blonde and beautiful . . . and intelligent. Most men overlooked that latter quality in her by their dreamy contemplation of the rest. Not for the world would she have let Pendran know that she had deliberately set out to find him. She had known that he was to make a final effort to join the Army Air Force today; and the fact that he had not called her was evidence enough that once again he had failed. Disappointment makes a man do many unpredictable things—and some predictable ones. When her telephone calls to his hangars at Glenview and to his apartment failed to locate him, she had remembered his mention of beers with Sig North at Al's Place. And when the telephone book disclosed the proximity of the tavern to the recruiting office—well, it was worth trying.

Yes, she loved him, and it was pretty evident that he loved her—when he wasn't thinking or talking about planes; but it would never do for him to think she hadn't found him by accident. A man was funny that way: let him think you were sorry for him and he wouldn't be around any more.

Pendran called the barman over, ordered a Stinger for Mary and bourbon for himself.

"I'm licked, Mary," he said bitterly. "None of 'em will have me. Got a color-blind thumb, or something. Only thing left is to sit around and wait for my draft number to come up."

She sipped her drink daintily. "The army isn't such a bad place, Art. You'll find plenty of action in it."

"But I don't belong on the ground! All I've done since high school is to learn how to walk on clouds!" He gulped down the contents of his glass and beckoned to the barkeep.

Unobserved by Pendran, Mary Gra-

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ham caught the attendant's eye and shook her head slightly. She said, "I've got to be getting back to the hotel, Art. Tomorrow's mine to do with as I please, and I want plenty of sleep so I can be up early."

She hoped for the right response, and he didn't disappoint her.

"That reminds me," he said, forgetting the barman hadn't responded to his signal, "I was going to call you in the morning and suggest we fly down to St. Louis and see Jean and Hugo. Want to?"

"I'd love it! Supposing we take a cab and you drop me off at the hotel on the way to your place."

"Wel-ll . . ." He had wanted to get drunk, and wasn't very far from attaining his goal. "It's still quite early, Mary. Why not hit a night-spot or two before we go home?"

She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "It's after ten. If we make a night of it we'll have to pass up that St. Louis trip. I've got to be back for the eleven o'clock flight to New York tomorrow night. And I *would* like to see Jean."

Pendran surrendered. "Okay; so would I." He slid from the stool, helped Mary down, and tossed a bill on the bar. "Come on."

In the cab, headed for the near North Side hotel where Mary usually put up for her between-flights layovers, Arthur Pendran said:

"I should spend a couple of hours looking over the blueprints on that cabin job Jerry Travers is interested in. But, darn it all, I don't feel like thinking about planes. Not after what happened down at the recruiting office."

She put a small, cool hand on his fingers. "Of course you don't, Art. Tell you what: take a shower, go to bed and curl up with a book. Something that hasn't got a plane or a war in it."

Pendran laughed. "You know, Mary, I don't think I've read a novel since I was fifteen. Maybe I will tonight, just for the sheer novelty of it!"

A few moments later the taxi drew to a stop before the marquee in front of Mary's hotel. Pendran helped her out, kissed her warmly, to the cabbie's evident approval, and re-entered the cab.

"I'll call for you around nine," he said, through the lowered window.

"Right. I'll be ready. Goodnight, Art."

"Goodnight."

He watched her enter the hotel, then gave the driver his own address and settled back. The cab turned east at the next cross-street and headed for Lake Shore Drive.

PENDRAN'S four room apartment overlooked a corner of Lincoln Park and the lake beyond. A woman came in twice a week to clean—this was as near as he cared to come to having servants. Occasionally he prepared his own meals, but for the most part he ate at the hamburger stand across the road from his hangars in Glenview.

He showered, brewed and drank several cups of black coffee to dispel the taste of liquor from his mouth and, in pajamas, went in to examine the living-room book shelves.

Myles Pendran had been an omnivorous reader, and after his death, Arthur had moved his books to the new apartment. Among them were several sets, specially bound; and it was from these that Pendran made his selection.

It was one of a blue-bound set of Samuel L. Clemens—an author totally unfamiliar to Arthur Pendran. He glanced at the title and looked doubtful.

"A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," he read aloud. "That

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sounds dry enough to put me to sleep in a hurry!"

He went into the comfortably masculine bedroom, threw back the covers and snapped on a reading lamp. After opening the windows to the cool air off the lake, he lit a cigarette, stretched out on the huge double bed and opened the book. . . .

Bong. Bong.

It was the sound of the living-room mantel clock striking the hour. But Arthur Pendran never heard it. Hank Morgan and Clarence were discussing the latter's system of wiring the electrical fence about Merlin's Cave where a stand was being made against the Church and all England's knighthood. . . .

And at that moment, the reading light went out, plunging the room into absolute darkness!

"Damn!" he muttered. He put the book face down across his knee and lifted his hand to where the reading lamp should have been. Should have been—*but wasn't.*

Several surprising facts came into his consciousness within the same moment: the mattress under him seemed suddenly lumpy and hard; the light from the stars and park lights beyond his window had disappeared; and his room seemed cold and damp.

He sat up abruptly and lowered his feet to the floor . . . then jerked them back with a muttered exclamation. They had touched cold, rough, damp stone instead of the soft pile of a bedroom rug.

Before his dazed mind could attempt an explanation for these incredible discoveries, a door opened in what should have been the solid wall across from where he lay, and a bent old man, bearing a flickering torch, stood in the opening. He wore a long black gown, and a white beard depended to his waist.

Pendran closed his eyes tightly, then opened them again; but the vision endured. He said, "Who the hell are you."

The old man's face was shining with excitement and satisfaction. He said, in the cracked falsetto of the very old:

"God keep us! Then thou *hast* come."

CHAPTER II

Mission Uncompleted

THE man lay pressed tightly against the ground in the shelter of a line of bushes. Above was the gray-blue sky of daybreak, and below, beyond the line of bushes, lay the tiny village of Carignan just over the French side of the Franco-Belgian frontier.

From time to time he turned his head nervously toward the heavy growth of timber cloaking the hill immediately behind him; and his actions and expression clearly indicated that he was hiding from someone or something as yet undisclosed.

The man was breathing heavily, drawing great, shuddering breaths of the warm July air into his lungs. His pursuers had flushed him, an hour before, from the small gully where he had spent the night; and in an effort to throw them off his trail, he had veered to the south, rather than continue west toward the English Channel, still nearly three hundred kilometers away.

Suddenly the faint crackle of foliage reached his straining ears from the depths of the forest-cloaked hillside. Instantly he came to his feet and, in a crouching position, broke through the fringe of bushes and plunged down the slope toward Carignan, not more than three or four kilometers distant.

Half way down the incline he cut

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sharply to the left, seeking to put an extended arm of the forest between him and the eyes of those who sought him. The outskirts of the village were very near, now, yet he saw no visible signs that any of its inhabitants were abroad.

The white roadway leading into Carignan's main thoroughfare lay directly in front of him, finally; this he did not cross but altered his course, instead, to move parallel with it.

This was July, 1941. Hardly a year before, the mechanized divisions of Adolph Hitler had passed this way, driving before them the bewildered legions of France and Great Britain. So quick the retreat, so rapid the advance, that only a single bomb crater beside the road, and a fire-gutted house, gave evidence that war had come again to France.

Moving cautiously, using every possible bit of cover, the man skirted one side of the village. It was his intention to go on past the town to the tree-covered hills beyond, thus leaving his hunters to waste valuable time combing through every building of the village. By the time this was done, he should have gained enough ground to out-maneuver them completely.

The success of this strategy depended on not being seen by any of the village inhabitants. Should a chance observer see him pass the town without stopping, it was more than likely that his pursuers would be informed of that fact and he would gain nothing.

His luck failed to hold. He was crossing a bit of cleared ground directly behind a great stone church, when he heard voices and the sound of approaching feet from around the far corner of the same building.

WITHOUT hesitation, he wheeled and slipped behind the opposite side-wall of the church. Here he flattened himself against the white stone and waited, his ears cocked to follow the still audible voices. And when he heard them growing more distinct, he knew their owners were nearing a point from which he would be visible to them.

His sharp eyes darted frantically about, seeking a place of concealment. At once they caught sight of a side door of the church only a few feet from where he stood.

Sight and action were simultaneous. Heart pounding with fear that the door might be locked, he seized the knob and twisted it sharply over, at the same time pressing his shoulder against the wood. Silently the portal moved inward, and a second later he was inside, the door closed at his back.

A quick glance assured him the high-vaulted interior was completely deserted. The rows of wooden pews bordering either side of the nave were empty of life. Light, faint and gray, came through the clerestory windows.

His rough, peasant's shoes were soundless on the carpeted transept as he moved on tip-toe past the altar. On the opposite side of the apse was a second door, identical to the one through which he had entered the cathedral. It was his intention to leave through that door, thereby avoiding the pair outside, and continue on into the hills.

The sudden creak of hinges froze him in his tracks. A sliver of light appeared where the great central doors were located at the western end of the structure. He cursed under his breath, looked wildly around. A small door, partially concealed by heavy drapes, caught his eye from behind the altar; and heedless of what might lie in wait, he sprang across the intervening space and entered the room beyond.

Light from windows along one wall

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disclosed a narrow, rather deep chamber, empty of life. Except for several glass display cases under the windows, the place was unfurnished.

At the opposite end of the room was a second door, also closed. He covered the distance between on swift, soundless feet and pressed his ear to the crack. From the other side came the sound of murmuring voices and moving bodies.

Wheeling, he retraced his steps to the first door. But this time it was not necessary to strain his ears for indications that the auditorium was no longer deserted. The shuffling of feet and the whisper of voices told him that a goodly portion of Carignan's populace had turned out for early morning Mass.

He was trapped! At any moment the second door might open under the hand of some church dignitary on his way to the altar.

His keen mind found, examined, and discarded several ideas for escape—all within seconds. Beneath the rude garments of a French peasant, his lean, muscular body was perfectly relaxed, his narrow, aristocratic features free from any indication of panic. Only a man of unusual abilities and perfect confidence could expect to carry to a successful conclusion this most difficult of missions. It was the careful decision of those who had engaged his services that he, above all men of Europe, was possessor of those abilities.

A plan came to his mind, now, a plan that he did not like, one that entailed great risk and—perhaps worse—loss of invaluable time. But he lacked time in which to conceive a better.

MOVING with quick precision, he slid behind the nearest display case, reached in and removed a stemmed goblet-like cup of dull-finished metal, apparently silver. In times past he had come across similar cups; and his glimpse of the container, particularly the circumference of the stem, was responsible for the birth of his plan.

He quickly upended the cup and found—as he had expected—a round aperture in its base—an aperture that led into the hollow stem. Still holding the goblet, he slid his free hand beneath his left armpit, fumbled there for a moment, then brought forth a tiny silk-encased capsule no thicker than his little finger and perhaps two inches in length. This he inserted deep into the hollow stem, finding it necessary to force the object somewhat.

This done, he replaced the cup as he had found it, then glanced at the small, hand-lettered card beside it.

The words were in French:

SILVER GOBLET
(Roman)
Dating from about the First Century
Unearthed from Roman ruins near Exeter, Devon, England

Time was precious; he must hurry if he were to outwit those who sought him. Yet he remained there for another long moment, staring at the cup with puzzled eyes.

Some strange property of that goblet had caused his fingers to tingle faintly while holding it!

It was almost as though the cup were impregnated with some electrical current of low voltage.

A sound at the eastern door of the room galvanized the man into action. Running lightly on the balls of his feet, he crossed to the door through which he had originally entered. Opening it, he stepped calmly into the now well-filled church and unobtrusively slid into a vacant place on the nearest bench.

At one side of him was an elderly

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woman in black; she sat stiff and still, her eyes fixed on the altar while her trembling fingers fumbled at the rosary about her neck. Obviously her thoughts were miles away from the stranger beside her.

At his left was a small-boned little man of indeterminate age in a neat, dark suit and an uncomfortably high, stiff collar. His button-like eyes were shooting stealthy side-long glances at the newcomer, and his pointed nose quivered with nervous curiosity.

The stranger silently damned the little man. One such as this could ruin his plans completely—possibly cost him his life. His intention was to remain until the service was over, linger until the cathedral was empty, then regain the secreted capsule and slip into the hills. His chief danger lay in the fact that those seeking him would doubtless enter the village before he could get away. That in itself would not be fatal, unless the little busybody on his left——

THE entrance of the servers and the priest—the latter a tall, sparse man in the habiliments worn at low Mass—interrupted the thought. The congregation rose with a rustling of feet while he approached the altar. There he knelt, murmured a few words, then rose and placed the chalice in its customary spot.

There were lines in his face that would not have been there in less trying times; and his eyes were those of one who has witnessed the suffering and privations of his fellow men.

The flames of the two candles wavered in the soft air from open windows.

"Dominus vobiscum," intoned the priest.

"Et cum spiritu tuo," chanted the red-robed servers.

Servers and congregation sank to their knees. The priest, finger-tips pressed together in the attitude of prayer, turned and knelt at the altar step.

War and strife, hunter and quarry—all that was violent and cruel—had no place here. For the first time in more years than he cared to recall, the stranger prayed. It came not from fear and the hope of escape from his enemies, but from a source beyond the exigencies of the moment. And he was comforted.

The priest rose at last. And the assemblage resumed their seats. A hush settled over the crowded pews as the celebrant took his place at the altar.

From his lips came words that were old when Europe was a wilderness.

"Omnia secula seculorum."

There was a slight flurry of activity at the rear of the church.

"Gloria Patri, et——"

"Achtung!"

The sharp, guttural command came from one of a group of uniformed men midway along the nave.

There were four of them—three in the black attire of the *S.S. Totenkopfverbaende,* the silver skulls-and-crossbones on their caps glinting evilly in the light. The fourth was a tall, rawboned individual with blond hair and a thin, arrogant face; he wore the handsome gray uniform of the *Sicherheitsdienst,* with the silver letters S.D. embroidered within a black square on one sleeve.

Significantly, not one of the churchgoers turned his head to stare at the newcomers. All eyes remained steadfastly on the priest, and each face maintained an impassive expression.

A new element had come into the atmosphere, an element that had no place in a house of worship. It was Hatred, definite and unadorned—hatred for these agents of Germany and

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for everything they represented.

"Your indulgence, Father," said the German in the gray uniform. He spoke in French, heavily accented. "Only a matter of the greatest urgency could cause us to interrupt these services."

The priest said, quietly, "I am Father Dalcroix. What is it you want?"

"We have reason to believe," said the Gestapo agent urbanely, "that a German citizen named Paul Albrecht is hiding somewhere in Carignan. We want him."

"I know of no one by that name."

"Naturally. He could have arrived here only during the last hour."

"Then why," asked Father Dalcroix evenly, "do you find it necessary to question me?"

The officer's expression remained bland. "We wish to determine if there is a stranger among your congregation this morning. If so, will you kindly point him out to us?"

"In the House of God, no man is a stranger," the priest said simply.

The man in gray began to lose patience. "Your observation is allegorical, Father. Also, it is evasive. Please understand: if necessary, every member of your congregation will be questioned. It will simplify matters, and save time, if any stranger present is pointed out to us immediately."

Father Dalcroix shook his head. "I cannot help you, monsieur."

There was a brief moment of silence as the eyes of the two men locked.

"As you will," said the German finally. "Please remember that I sought to spare the people of Carignan any unpleasantness."

HE TURNED to his three companions and spoke briefly to them in German. There followed an exchange of brisk salutes, and the black-uniformed trio separated to take up positions at the three doors leading to the outdoors. Their leader then came forward until he was within an arm's length of the altar. There, he turned to face the occupants of the pews, his dusty, scratched boots spread slightly as though to brace him against the mute hostility. In cold, precise tones he said:

"I am satisfied that Paul Albrecht is among you. You have three minutes to produce him. Otherwise, I shall select, at random, three from among you and have them taken outside and shot!"

There was an involuntary and collective gasp from the listeners. Father Dalcroix descended hurriedly from behind the altar and caught the speaker by an arm.

"*Mon Dieu!* You cannot do this to innocent people!"

The officer shook off the hand. Ignoring the priest, he continued in the same emotionless voice:

"These executions will continue, three at one time, until either Albrecht is produced or every man here is dead!

"If there is any doubt that I will do as I have promised, please bear in mind that I am Fredrich von Lemske. Perhaps you have heard the name before this."

It was clear that they had. Dalcroix, his face suddenly ashen, stepped hurriedly back and crossed himself. It was Fredrich von Lemske who had ordered the deaths of three hundred Czech students the previous winter; whose record of ruthless brutality surpassed even that of Reinhardt Heydrich, the infamous *Obergruppenfuehrer* of the *Sicherheitsdienst.*

The hunted stranger, Paul Albrecht, was striving to make a decision. Delivery of the tiny capsule meant more to France, to the Allies—in fact, to the

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entire civilized world—than did the lives of every person of the village. And yet . . . could he sit silently by and watch man after man go to death because he, Paul Albrecht, would not——

"One minute."

Von Lemske spoke those two words coldly, almost indifferently. He stood with head bent, eyes intent on the hands of his wristwatch.

The black-uniformed guard in front of the door at the end of the north transept was only a few feet from where Albrecht sat. Perhaps a sudden dash would surprise him before he could draw his gun. . . . But no; the guard across the church could shoot him down before he would have taken four steps. If only he hadn't lost his own gun during his tumble down that hillside the previous day!

"Two minutes."

Suddenly a wave of fury swept over Paul Albrecht. Damn a filthy animal that would terrorize a helpless people with such evident relish! It made him hate himself because he, too, was German. He'd give himself up, by God, and to hell with——

He was spared the trouble.

THE small-boned man with the pointed nose sprang to his feet, almost stumbling over Albrecht's legs in his haste.

"There is the man!" he cried shrilly, pointing a wavering finger at Albrecht. "He is the one you want! He is not one of us!"

The man in the rough garb of a French peasant made no effort to evade the two guards coming toward him with drawn pistols. He eyed the informer with compassionate understanding, for he knew what a horrible thing fear could be.

Von Lemske pushed the little man aside indifferently.

"You are Paul Albrecht?"

"Yes."

"Come with us."

As he rose to his feet, one of the guards stepped forward and ran his hands expertly over him, searching for hidden weapons. Finding none, he stepped back and nodded briefly to the leader.

They went back up the nave, Albrecht among them, with brisk, firm strides. From the corners of his eyes Paul saw that the people in the seats were not watching him and his captors; instead their eyes were hostilely intent on someone in the front row.

The little man with the long nose had aided the agents of Germany, and the people of Carignan would neither forget nor forgive. . . .

They came out into the sun-splashed coolness of a summer morning. Never before, thought Paul, had the outdoors seemed so lovely, never before had colors and objects seemed so vivid and sharply defined. Was it thus because he knew he was seeing them for the last time? He was not afraid to die, he assured himself, but torture was another matter. Von Lemske's entire future depended on finding that capsule, and, as a graduate of the Gestapo *Ordensburgen* at Munich, he was qualified to wrest information from the most stubborn of tongues.

He tried to beat back his mood of fatalistic antipathy. He had been in tight places before this—many of them! And always before he was able to wriggle out with a whole skin.

His captors made no attempt to interrupt his thoughts. That, again, was part of von Lemske's methods. Give a man a chance to think over what was in store for him and often his resistance was gone before it began. But, if it endured, there were other ways. . . .

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ON A SIDE street, a short distance off the town's principal avenue, stood the headquarters of the local gendarmerie. The five men entered the building and von Lemske held a brief, low-voiced colloquy with the chief. The latter, a short, very bowlegged Frenchman with a bristling moustache, finally shrugged resignedly and led the group to a small, white-washed room on the second floor, containing a deal table and two straight-backed chairs.

Von Lemske, once the chief was withdrawn and the door closed, wasted no time.

"All right, Albrecht; disrobe."

His face impassive, Paul Albrecht stripped to the skin and handed his clothing to one of the guards, who went promptly to work on it with systematic thoroughness and a pocket-knife.

The *Gruppenfuehrer* leaned against a corner of the table and watched while Albrecht's apparel was carefully reduced to shreds. As the minute inspection neared an unfruitful end, his face began slowly to darken with rage. And when the agent pushed aside the remnants and turned up the palms of his hands in silent acknowledgement of failure, von Lemske stood up and came over to the naked man.

He pointed to a chair. "Sit down, Albrecht."

Paul obeyed, and the leader drew up the remaining chair and sat down across from him. He drew a cigarette case of hammered silver from the breast pocket of his tunic, flipped back the lid and extended it. "Smoke?"

Albrecht accepted one of the paper tubes with a steady hand, took the proffered light and leaned back.

"Albrecht," the German began, speaking with calm restraint, "I do not propose to play cat-and-mouse games with you. *You* know why we have spent the past two weeks trying to get our hands on you; now I am going to tell you what *we* know. Thus will I show why it will be useless for you to answer my questions with lies.

"First: You are Paul Albrecht, alias Rudolph Myer, alias Paul Hauptmann, alias Richard Saar. You were born in Seehausen, Saxony, thirty-seven years ago. Second: You are perhaps the foremost *agent provocateur* of all Europe. In that capacity you rendered extraordinary services to the German government. For two years previous to the invasion of Poland you were attached to the Luftwaffe Intelligence under the direct orders of Marshal Goering. You were reported killed during the seige of Warsaw.

"All right. Now we come up to the present. Two months ago one of our agents, a man who knows you very well, reported he had seen Paul Albrecht in the company of Ernst Moeller, a Nazi Party member whom we have long suspected of being a traitor. Through certain connections that I need not explain, it was learned that you had been selected to carry out an important mission—a mission that could conceivably bring Germany loss of the war.

"It was learned that you were to pick up a small package at Moeller's home on a certain night and deliver it, by plane, directly to British Intelligence Headquarters in England. Our decision was to allow you to accept the package, then intercept you while leaving Moeller's house on your way to the plane."

He paused long enough to light fresh cigarettes for Paul and himself, then continued:

"But you outwitted us, Albrecht. I'll give you credit for being a wily customer. While we did prevent you from getting to the plane, we were not able to lay you by the heels. And for two

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weeks we've been chasing you completely across Germany, always close behind you, but never close enough. Until today.

"We know what's in that little package, Albrecht. You see, Ernst Moeller told us everything about it. We were forced to be—well—unpleasant; but he told us."

Paul Albrecht exhaled a blue ribbon of smoke and shook his head.

"That last happens to be untrue, von Lemske," he said coolly. "Moeller shot himself to death while your men were forcing their way into his study."

A WAVE of dark blood suffused the *Gruppenfuehrer's* thin-skinned cheeks. "So you know that, eh? Well, it is of no importance. I want that package, Albrecht. Where is it?"

As simply as that. From now on, the glove would be off the iron hand. The prisoner felt his skin crawl under the realization of what lay ahead of him.

"I do not have it," he said.

"So I observe," von Lemske admitted dryly, pointing to the sliced bits of cloth and leather that had been Albrecht's clothing and shoes. "Since the package may be quite small, you may have secreted it in one of the cavities of your body. If so, producing it will save you the painful indignity of having my men make such a search."

"I do not have it."

Von Lemske shrugged. "As you wish." He motioned to one of the Death's-head guards. "Go over him—thoroughly."

A few moments later, the guard rose from his knees and stepped back.

"*Da ist nichts, Herr Gruppenfuehrer,*" he reported stolidly.

The leader sighed. "Very well, Albrecht; you can sit down again." He walked over to the barred window and stood there, staring into the street below.

The naked man let himself gingerly down on the chair seat and waited for further developments.

Five minutes dragged by. There was silence within the room. Outside, birds sang among the trees, and the shrill voices of children at play came through the open window. Paul felt little globules of sweat form on his forehead.

Abruptly von Lemske turned and came back to face the prisoner.

"Albrecht," he said crisply, "this has gone far enough. Tell me what you have done with that packet and I will give you your freedom. My word of honor."

Paul had his private opinion of the leader's honor, but he kept it to himself. Slowly he shook his head.

"I do not have it," he said for the third time.

"Who does?"

"Otto Dreiser," he lied, his quick mind having hit on a way to stave off what eventually must come . . . if it worked.

"Who is Otto Dreiser?" von Lemske asked, obviously taken aback by the information.

"An acquaintance of mine."

"When?"

"Five days ago."

"I am to believe that you gave the packet to this Otto Dreiser five days ago?"

"It is the truth," Albrecht mumbled.

"Where?"

"At Dahlem."

"Explain."

"I ran across him a few miles outside the town. He hates the Party bitterly because his son was executed on trumped-up charges. I told him what I was trying to do, that I was likely to be caught at almost any minute, and

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asked if he would attempt to carry out my mission. He agreed eagerly. I then gave him the packet and complete instructions; then I continued on, hoping to delay my own capture long enough to allow Otto to gain the coast."

VON LEMSKE rubbed his chin thoughtfully, his chill blue eyes boring into those of the prisoner. Finally he said:

"No . . . no. It won't do, Albrecht. It's a little too coincidental; too—too pat. It appears I shall have to force the truth out of you."

Tiny bits of ice seemed to move up Paul Albrecht's spine, but he kept his face expressionless.

"I have given you the facts," he said.

"That is unfortunate—for you. I must proceed under the premise that you have lied. If your memory improves at any time during the next hour or so, you will be spared further . . . questioning."

He turned away, then, and said a few words to one of his companions in a voice too low for Paul to hear. The man saluted and left the room, closing the door behind him.

The remaining pair of guards leaned against the table and kept their eyes fixed unwaveringly on the prisoner. Paul sat with head bowed, ears unconsciously straining for the returning footsteps of the absent member of the group.

Von Lemske had gone back to his thoughtful contemplation of the street below. . . .

And then the door opened and the black-uniformed man came in, gingerly carrying a small brazier containing blazing charcoal. Held in place under one of his arms was a slender, pointed length of iron.

He placed his burden on the table and stepped back as von Lemske sauntered over and picked up the iron poker. He hefted it appraisingly, then thrust it deep into the burning charcoal and left it there.

"Your whip, Walter," he murmured.

"Jawohl, Herr Gruppenfuehrer." The Elite Guard reached inside his uniform coat and brought out a tightly rolled length of rawhide with a short weighted handle.

The leader uncoiled the single strand, allowing the tip to dangle in front of Paul's bowed head.

"Listen to me, Albrecht," he said tightly. "Have you ever felt the bite of leather across you cheek? *Like this?"*

Crack!

Paul recoiled involuntarily as a knife-blade of fire seared his left cheek. He felt the muscles of his stomach contract and knew hazily that fear did that to a man.

"Put down your hands, Albrecht."

Obediently he dropped them against his naked legs. He had to grit his teeth to do it, but he knew any remonstrance would be futile.

All traces of politeness were gone, now, from the voice of the S.D. man. He said:

"I want that packet, Albrecht. Either tell me now where you have hidden it, or you get twenty-five lashes to loosen your tongue. Which will it be?"

Paul Albrecht swallowed. God give him the strength to endure! "I've told you the truth, von Lemske; what else do you want?"

"The truth, damn you!" He motioned savagely to his assistants. "On the table with him! I'll beat this dog to death!"

WITH the celerity of experience, they jerked the nude man from his chair and slammed him face down across the table. He felt the wood

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grind painfully into his cheek under the weight of ruthless hands.

The whistle of rawhide through the air.

Cr-rack!

Liquid acid, eating a thin path across a bare back.

"Ein," said an indifferent voice.

Again the whistle.

Cr-rack!

A red cloud of agony blotted out the light, and blood from his bitten lip touched his tongue.

"Zwei."

At the sixth impact he groaned aloud; at the twelfth he screamed, thin and high, like a woman.

And relentlessly the bloodied lash rose and fell.

Merciful unconsciousness kept him from feeling the last seven blows. A dipper of water, dashed against his face, brought him to, and he was dragged from the table and shoved back on to the chair.

"Albrecht, can you hear me?"

"Uh."

"Where is that packet?"

"I—I . . ."

"Spit it out, you dog! *Where is that packet?"*

". . . told you. Please . . ."

A brutal hand in his thick hair jerked his head up.

"The next time, it'll be fifty, Albrecht."

The skin of his back, from neck to hips, was on fire. The thought of further torment made the room spin before his eyes. He couldn't bear any more. A man could only stand so much. Must he be expected to suffer to save the pain and misery of the world's people?

"Think, Albrecht. Cool salves and bandages for your back. A soft bed; sleep. No more pain. Tell me: *where is that packet?"*

"Water . . ."

"Yes. You can have water. All you want. Cold water, Albrecht. When I have that packet."

"Oscar Dreiser . . . has it."

"Oscar Dreiser? Before, it was *Otto* Dreiser! Now I know you're lying! Perhaps *this* will put an end to your falsehoods!"

Von Lemske disappeared from the radius of Paul's agony-clouded eyes, then was back again almost immediately. In his right hand he held the iron poker brought from below, five inches of its tip a dull glowing red.

"One last chance, Albrecht," he growled. "Do you tell me what I want to know, or do I burn it out of you?"

The battered man cowered back, shielding his face with trembling hands. He opened his mouth to speak, to cry out the information von Lemske wanted; but terror paralyzed the muscles of his throat so that he could only croak meaningless sounds.

The gray-uniformed leader should have waited. But his patience—never a strong characteristic with him—snapped a moment ahead of victory.

"All right," he snarled. "If you won't talk, then by God you'll sing!"

And with that he laid the poker tip squarely against Paul Albrecht's naked chest!

"Aieeeeee!"

So inhuman the keening cry, so terrible the depths of suffering it portrayed, that the four members of the Gestapo felt their scalps crawl. The tortured man twisted violently back from the searing metal; his chair went over backward and he fell heavily, his head striking the floor with a resounding thump.

VON LEMSKE, his thin lips curling with revulsion, eyed the motionless figure for a moment. Then he

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turned and replaced the poker tip back among the burning charcoal in the brazier.

"Bring him 'round," he ordered. "I doubt that he'll give—— Wait! What's he saying?"

The lips of the unconscious man were moving, and a low-voiced mumble reached the ears of von Lemske and his henchmen. They pressed forward, heads bent in a listening attitude.

"' . . . He maketh me to lie down in green pastures . . . '"

Von Lemske uttered a startled oath. "The poor fool is praying!"

"Out of his mind," observed one of the others uneasily.

They looked at one another uncertainly. Despite the doctrine of Adolph Hitler, it seemed wrong to interrupt a man's prayers.

"' . . . He restoreth my soul . . . '"

The S.D. man wet his lips. "Pick him up; we're wasting time."

They propped the babbling shell of a once powerful man onto the chair seat. Blood from his back smeared the wooden rounds, and from the five-inch brown-red welt on his chest came the stench of burned flesh and hair.

"Albrecht," von Lemske said loudly. "Are you ready to talk?"

The pain-racked eyes fluttered open. They rolled wildly in their sockets, saw nothing. The twisted lips continued to move.

"' . . .anointeth my head with oil; my cup runneth over . . . '"

He stopped there, and a mad light suddenly blazed up in his eyes. "My —cup—runneth—over," he repeated slowly. Then: "Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! 'My cup runneth over!' Aha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Their skin crawled under the sound of the insane, screaming laughter. Von Lemske snatched up the whip and brought it slashing across Albrecht's face. "Shut up! Shut up, you fool!"

The blow seemed to restore a semblance of sanity to the lash-marked, twisted countenance. Slowly Albrecht lifted a wavering hand to his lips as though to steady their twitching.

And then he acted!

With a mighty bound he rose from the chair and flung himself toward the table, knocking two of the guards aside with his shoulders. Before the men realized his purpose, he had snatched the fire-tipped poker from the pan of coals, gripping it as one would hold a club.

The four Gestapo agents leaped back, von Lemske clawing for his gun and shouting, "Put it down, Albrecht; put it down, or I'll shoot!"

In answer, Albrecht brought his two hands together in front of him, the poker pointing upward. Then without a word, without a glance at the horrified audience, he drove the burning point of the poker with all the strength of his arms full into his own right eye!

For fully a minute the four men stood staring down at the distorted figure of the dead traitor, the length of iron still embedded in its skull. And then von Lemske slid unsteady fingers into an inner pocket of his coat and brought out a small, leather-bound note-book. Opening it to the desired page, he produced a fountain-pen and wrote rapidly for a moment or two.

Finishing, he started to close the book—then hesitated, his eyes on the corpse. He smiled, then, with clear satisfaction, and added two more words to the text:

"Mission uncompleted."

CHAPTER III

Mission from the Past

IT REQUIRED a full minute for Arthur Pendran to recover use of his

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voice. Meanwhile, the white-bearded old man continued to beam at him with utmost cordiality.

"Who are you?" Pendran repeated finally. "And how in blazes did you get in my apartment?"

The old one registered surprise. He quavered, "Marry! Then thou hast *named* thy dungeon?"

Pendran let out his breath in sharp exasperation.

"Now, *wait* a minute!" he snapped. "Let's get a few facts straight before we start on riddles. You sound like one of those Sixth Century dopes I've been read——"

He stopped abruptly in mid-sentence as the truth struck home. Why hell's bells, he was *dreaming!* That's what this was. Just a vivid dream.

He pushed out of his mind a nagging reminder that no dream could possibly be so realistic as this. He said, "Okay, I get it now. I suppose you're . . . let's see, now——" He paused and thought quickly back over the pages he had been reading. "Why, sure! You must be Merlin, the magician."

The old man's mouth fell open and he grasped hastily at the door jamb for support.

"God's Wownds! This passeth mine understanding! Art all men of thy time so gifted that they may call aloud the name of whomsoever they first chance to see?"

"Sometimes," Pendran admitted, grinning. "Then thou—I mean, then *you* are really Merlin?"

"I am so called," admitted the old man proudly. "And sith I am known to thee, peradventure I can give *thy* name also."

"It's a good trick if you can do it," agreed Pendran.

"Then list as I name thee. Thou hight Sir Arthur Pendragon—God keep the name."

The young man shook his head, still grinning. "Not bad. Of course, you got the last name a little balled up . . . and the 'Sir' doesn't fit. My name's Arthur Pendran."

Merlin smiled mysteriously. "Come; let us tarry not. The queen awaits thee with sore patience."

"Queen?" Arthur looked down at his pajamas. Even in dreams, he reflected, it would not do to call on royalty in such garb. "How about some decent clothes?"

"Clothes?" echoed Merlin, bewildered. "I fail to grasp thy meaning."

"Something to wear. A suit and shirt." He got off the crude bunk and rose to his feet. "Look," pointing to his pajama coat, "I *sleep* in these!"

"Ah, thy *garments!*" The light of understanding dawned on the wrinkled, hairy face. "They are there." He pointed to a crude stool at the foot of the pallet.

There, neatly folded, lay the same brown suit, white shirt and dark orange tie Pendran had worn during the previous day. And on the dank stone floor were his socks and brown calf-skin oxfords.

"Don them quickly," Merlin urged, "for the good queen must even now count the passing minutes. An it please thee, I shall withdraw until thou art suitably garbed."

"Not necessary," Pendran said cheerfully, shrugging off his pajamas and reaching for the heap of clothing. "I'm not bashful."

He dressed hastily, finding it more difficult by the moment to regard this experience as a dream. Impressions and the evidence of his senses were too clearly defined to permit complete acceptance of such a theory. Yet there could be no other explanation.

Shoes tied, he slipped into his coat and turned to the waiting Merlin.

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"Okay, fella; let's go see Her Majesty."

HE FOLLOWED the aged magician outside the cell and up a crude flight of stone steps to a huge square chamber. Walls, ceiling and floor were of unfinished stone and the only furnishings were several ornately carved chairs grouped about a mammoth, wood-burning fireplace in one wall, and a low, marble dais at the far end of the room. A throne-like wooden chair, in blue and gold, flanked by two circular shields, stood atop the dais; it was unoccupied. Crudely woven tapestries hung from the walls at several points, but they failed dismally to lighten the chill, uncomfortable gloom of the place.

Before a doorless opening near the dais stood a burly man-at-arms in a white tunic and blue cape. His hands and arms were covered with chain mail and a close-fitting metal casque shielded his head and neck. Thick brown hair on his upper lip cloaked the mouth beneath.

Merlin nodded shortly to the man-at-arms, who turned immediately and disappeared through the doorway.

"Come with me to the throne," murmured the old man. "Our wait shall be brief, for the good queen burneth to hold council with thee."

Nor was he wrong; for hardly had they reached the foot of the elevation than a lovely young woman appeared in the opening, followed by a retinue of attendants.

The reddish silk of her dress hugged her rather tall, lissome figure almost to the knee, then flared out slightly to extend to the floor. Above the bodice her neck and shoulders were bare, revealing the warmly tinted perfection of flawless skin. A page boy in tunic and hose held the long train of her dress from contact with the rush-covered floor as she regally mounted the two steps of the dais and sank onto the chair. A male attendant draped several thick furs across the chair back to cushion her bare shoulders.

She seemed completely unaware of the presence of Merlin and Arthur Pendran as she shook back the waist-length strands of her curling, light blonde hair and raised a shapely hand to the circlet of gold resting on her head.

At last she turned her gaze to meet the rapt eyes of Arthur Pendran. An in that instant the half-mocking smile faded from the lips of the young American, and the quip he had been on the point of uttering died unborn.

Tragedy, recent and appalling, had left its mark on her delicate features. This was evident in the tear-reddened lids of her dark blue eyes and the temporary lines of suffering lightly etched in her cheeks. She was attempting to cloak her emotions under a brittle shell of stone-faced reserve.

"Then thou art Sir Arthur Pendragon," she observed, her voice soft and unutterably weary. "I bid thee welcome, my lord, to Camelot."

THE conviction that all this was but a vivid dream began to weaken in Arthur Pendran's mind as he stood there listening to the lovely young woman.

She held up a hand to halt what he was about to say.

"Nay, let me speak my fill. Thou hast been summoned from a distant age, and thou art woundily puzzled and distraught. For that, we crave thy pardon, my lord. To thy own age shalt thou shortly be returned; my word upon it. Nor is the pledge of Guinevere lightly given.

"As to how this was brought about, I knoweth not. Mayhap good Merlin can inform thee; it was he who arranged the miracle. Suffice it to say

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that we have need of thy services, fair lord, and naught must come between thee and the fulfillment of the task I presently will name."

Pendran squared his shoulders belligerently. "Just a minute, lady. I'm still not so sure this isn't all a nightmare; but even in nightmares I don't take a pushing around without putting up some kind of an argument. So, just for the record, suppose you answer me a few questions."

The girl's lips quirked slightly in a wan smile.

"Forsooth, thy words are wearisome to follow but I have their meaning. Ask as thou wilt."

"Okay . . . What year is this?"

"It falleth within the year of our Lord five hundred and thirty-seven, an it please you."

"537!"

"Even so."

Pendran shook his head slightly and expelled his breath in a long sigh.

"Well, I asked for it. . . . Now, why do you call me Arthur Pendragon? It's close, all right, but my name is Arthur Pen*dran.*"

"It is a twisting of thy true name you give me," the woman said promptly. "Know ye, my lord, that thy true forebear was the noble King Arthur, whose widowed queen am I."

Pendran's eyes bulged. "You mean you're my long-lost great-grandmother?"

Guinevere was forced to ponder over the last question for a long moment before she arrived at his meaning. Her smile was a trifle broader as she said:

"No blood of mine flows in thy blood, Sir Arthur. Merlin hath told me thou art from the issue of Sir Modred, whose father King Arthur was, but is no son of mine. But in thee, fair lord, is the blood of Arthur; were it not thus, Merlin could never have summoned thee across the centuries to us here."

"Which brings us back to where we started," Pendran mused. "Let me put this in Twentieth Century English, Guinevere, and see if I've got it straight.

"Because I happen to be a direct descendant of King Arthur, who lived about fourteen hundred years ago, Merlin—who lived at the same time—was able to reach into the future and bring me back to Merrie England of the Sixth Century. This was done because a certain job had to be pulled off and I'm the fair-haired boy who was elected to do it. And as soon as I finish it to your satisfaction, I get shipped back to *my* time. Is that the picture?"

She thought it over for a moment, struggling with Twentieth Century idiom and slang to get at his meaning. Her expression cleared finally, and she said:

"In part, you have it. Elsewhere, thou art in error. For wit ye, fair lord, thy mission lies not in this age *but in thine own!*"

Pendran showed his bewilderment. "You mean I'm to do a job for you in *my* time—fourteen hundred years from now?"

"Even so," Guinevere said equably.

Pendran scratched his head. "All right; I'm through asking questions. Suppose you just go ahead and give it to me in words of one syllable."

The queen nodded to the bearded old man standing beside him.

"Sith Merlin hath uncovered all truths in the matter, let him be the one to tell thee."

THE ancient one bowed to the queen and to Arthur Pendran and made ready to speak. The red-haired young man wondered if someone might fetch chairs, for the approaching explanation promised to be a long one; but it ap-

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peared that no one sat in the presence of the lovely Guinevere, so he said nothing.

"Knowest thou, Sir Arthur," Merlin began, "of the Holy Grail?"

"A little," Pendran admitted doubtfully. "It's supposed to be the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper. The knights of old used to go helling around . . . Excuse me," he ended lamely, noting the expressions of the queen and Merlin.

It was evident they were going to be Christian about his bad break and overlook it. Merlin continued:

"Long have the true knights of Arthur's Round Table sought the Grail, but found it not. And so I, Merlin, turned to mystic rites to aid in the search. After much disappointment I was able to reveal its place but, though I saw it, I could touch it not. Sith I saw it *two hundred years in the future!*

"For know ye, Sir Arthur: Whilst it lies within my power to see into the future, even unto the end of the world, it is beyond me to place my body beyond where it is at any moment called present. Thus, whilst I could *see* the Grail, I couldst touch it not.

"Only lately have I had revealed unto me the secret of transporting into the time of King Arthur those from a future age. And with this secret came a Heaven-sent plan: I would find where the Grail lay hidden, then summon a worthy knight from that time and prevail upon him to gain possession of the Grail. Then, whilst he held it in his hand, I would fetch him back through the ages to Camelot, that he might place the holy object within my keeping.

"Yes, it was a good plan, and I joyful. And then, in a dream, came a revelation that turned my joy as ashes in my mouth."

Under the spell of the old man's simple, eloquent, dramatic recital, Arthur Pendran completely forgot that all this was supposedly a dream.

"What was this revelation?" he demanded tensely.

"This: That only he in whose body was the blood of King Arthur be permitted to act in the mission."

"That stopped you, eh?"

"Verily. For whilst I found many in the ages between my time and thine whose blood was Arthur's, the location of the Grail remained a mystery. In those fourteen centuries I found the Grail but twice; the first I could find no trace of King Arthur's issue—the second, I found *you.*"

"And after my age?"

"All trace of the Grail was gone."

Pendran fingered his lower lip thoughtfully. "In other words, either *I* get the Holy Grail for you, or you don't get it at all."

Soberly, Merlin nodded. "You have named it," he said simply.

THE American let his gaze wander slowly about the room. He looked at the members of Guinevere's retinue in their colorful, over-stuffed clothing; at the men-at-arms, competent-looking in breastplates and morions, and stiff and erect, their halberds firm in mailed fists.

And, lastly, he stared thoughtfully at the lovely, sad-faced young woman on the throne and knew that what he was about to say would bring no relief to her.

"Sorry, folks," he said briskly, "but I can't help you!"

Merlin's face reflected only shock and disappointment; but Guinevere was of stronger stuff. Sudden rage fired her eyes and blazed in her expression.

"Guards!" she cried. "Hale me this dog to the rack!"

Pendran felt his heart bound into

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his throat as two of the men-at-arms started toward him with lowered halberds. Frantically he looked about for some weapon of defense.

"Hold!" came Merlin's high-pitched order. The guards came to an uncertain halt, bewildered by this clash of authority.

"My queen," Merlin said humbly, "such a course will avail us naught. Nor is it meet that we torture a guest in whom is the blood of dead Arthur."

Guinevere was not placated. "Forget ye not, Merlin," she snapped, "that my word, not thine, is law. Only by recovery of the Grail canst I find redemption for my sins and my part in the passing of my liege, the good King Arthur. And he doth not help me, he dies. I have said it!"

Merlin turned back to the red-thatched visitor from the future.

"Fair lord," he said quietly, "wouldst give reason for thy refusal of the aid we ask of you?"

"Sure," Pendran replied readily. "Why not? It's just that I've got plenty to do in helping my own country get ready to lick a bunch of other countries that are trying to make slaves of everyone else in the world. Hell, I haven't got *time* to run around trying to find some missing heirloom! There's a war to win!"

While the young man was speaking, Merlin's face began to lighten. He said:

"I wot this war of which you speak. England herself bleeds of its wounds. Thy purpose is noble, good sir. . . .

"Forsooth, is it not so that good nations have fallen to the Devil's hordes; that England's enemy seems soon to be victorious?"

"It's true we're not doing so well," Pendran admitted reluctantly. "But wait'll Uncle Sam sees the light and starts pouring out guns and planes and his fighting men. You'll see some changes then!"

Merlin shook his head. "Deceive not thyself, Sir Arthur. For this I tell you: naught will prevail against the forces of Evil else ye, *and ye alone,* act!"

Pendran's eyes widened. "How do you mean?"

"Wit ye well, Sir Arthur. When the Holy Grail falleth among evil hands, then doth evil triumph! In the time from which thou wert taken, the Grail hath passed into the hold of England's foe—even though that foe knoweth not his good fortune.

"An you wrest it from him, *on that day shall the tide turn against him and he be doomed!*"

THE silence that followed the pronouncement was impressive. Pendran's brow was wrinkled with a frown of indecision.

"Let's get this straight, old man," he said finally. "If I snatch this—this relic away from the Germans, then the Allies win the war. If I don't, then Herr Hitler and his mob take over. . . . You wouldn't kid me, would you, Merlin?"

"'Kid' thee?"

"I mean . . . well . . . you're telling the truth?"

Merlin's lined cheeks flushed. "Think ye I wouldst jeopard mine worship?"

Guinevere interrupted. "Prithee, Sir Arthur, accept the word of Merlin as mine own. Now that thou knowest how needful it be for thine own land that the Grail is found, have we thy pledge to take it from evil hands?"

Pendran surrendered. "All right. I'll take a shot at it. But I'll need some information. Where in my time is this goblet, or cup, or whatever it is? What's the name of the present owner? How will I recognize it when I see it? Am I

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supposed to buy it, or can I take it away from him?"

His acceptance removed a good deal of the strain from the atmosphere. Some of the sadness went out of Guinevere's countenance—and all of the anger. Merlin stroked his long beard with tender fingers and looked positively benign.

"The Grail," Merlin said, "is of silver. It hath a stem both short and hollowed. The bowl is round and squat; its mouth is wide."

"Not much of a description," Pendran complained. "Can't you tell me more?"

"Legend hath it," the old man said, "that its touch gives to the fingers a slight tingle. This I can take no oath; for that privilege hast been denied me, though I wouldst give this, my right arm for—"

"Okay, okay." Pendran cut him off. It was difficult enough to understand the important things, without struggling through a lot of useless palaver. "Now, where is the Grail, exactly?"

Merlin spread his hands. "As to that, I knowest not; although rumor hath it that——"

"What?" bellowed the American. "Well, how the hell do you expect me to find this thing if you, yourself, don't know where it is? The world's a lot bigger today than it was in your time, mister, and——"

"Patience!" Merlin interrupted. "I can help thee somewhat. Mayhap the Grail canst be found in Gaul; thus did it seem to me. It sat with other articles of metal upon a ledge of gleaming wood, behind some odd stone through which mine eyes could see. A tiny bit of paper lay beside each article, bearing words in a tongue unknown to me. As mine eyes feasted upon the Grail, a priest walked through the room wherein it was. . . . This be all that I know."

"Which isn't much!" Pendran grunted. He was silent for a few moments, eyes thoughtfully downcast, while his quick mind mulled over what the magician had told him.

"Gaul," he muttered half to himself. "That's France. Hmm. Not a very healthy place to go wandering around in, now that the Germans have taken it over. This business of the cup being in a glass case—I suppose that's what you mean by stone you can see through—sounds like a museum of some sort.

"But the Germans are supposed to have cleaned out France's museums. And then this business of a priest. . . . Say! Maybe it's in a church. The krautheads might draw the line at looting places like that."

He nodded decisively and looked up to meet the intent eyes of Merlin and the queer.

"Okay," he said. "I'll see what I can do. Get me back to 1941 so I can go to work on this job."

MERLIN smiled, and he and Guinevere exchanged quick glances. The young woman nodded slightly, and the old man turned back to the visitor.

"Think ye, my lord, that we wouldst let thee go forth on a mission so fraught with danger, yet not see thee seemly armed? Not so! Into thy hand shall King Arthur's own sword be placed; thus shall no harm come to thee."

Pendran grinned. "Thanks, Merlin, but I'm afraid a sword wouldn't be of much use. Not against machine guns and hand grenades and such modern cultural improvements!"

"Even against such," Merlin replied proudly, "will Arthur's sword prevail, I ween. Let thine own eyes give answer."

He motioned to a pair of nearby men-at-arms and said: "Get thee hence

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and fetch Excalibur!"

The two men bowed and left—to return within a few minutes, bearing between them a long, gleaming sword of such size and weight that one alone could not handle it. They brought it up to the top of the dais and placed it gently at Guinevere's feet.

The sword was a beautiful example of an armorer's craft. It was between four and five feet long, double-edged and pointed, with a hilt large enough for both hands. The blade was of burnished steel that shone brightly in the light; the hilt was of beaten gold and studded with near-precious gems. The entire weapon was both lovely and lethal.

Pendran stared at it with wide eyes. Merlin said, "Take up thy sword, Sir Arthur, that ye may confound those evil folk who hold the Grail!"

Obediently the young man bent, wrapped both hands about the handle and, by a mighty effort, succeeded in lifting the sword from the floor.

He let it sink back almost at once. "Hunh *unh!* Too heavy! I'm no sword-slinging stalwart like my revered ancestor. Thanks just the same, Merlin, but I'll stick to tommy-guns."

"Marry!" said the old magician, "the veriest page of the court can outlift thee. For look ye, Sir Arthur, yon sword is of feather lightness—yea, even more so. For it floateth upon empty air!"

Whereupon, he gestured with his hands and the sword called Excalibur rose lightly into the air and hung there, suspended between Pendran and the seated queen!

The young American let out a startled gasp of pure amazement and recoiled so sharply that the two nearby men-at-arms grasped his arms to prevent him from falling.

"An thou art without fear," Merlin remarked lightly, his lips quivering to match the smiles of the queen and her attendants, "thou mayest set thy hand upon the sword and note its lack of weight."

GINGERLY Pendran reached out an unsteady hand and closed his fingers about the rippled-gold hilt. He made a few experimental passes in the air, the sword following his direction as though it were fashioned of pasteboard.

"Not bad," he admitted wonderingly. "Blade seems pretty sharp; might be useful for digging trenches, at that."

"Test its edge against yon stone," Merlin invited, pointing to the corner of the marble dais.

Pendran was aghast. "No sense to that. It might chip the steel—or blunt it."

"Fear not. Excalibur be equal to the task."

With obvious reluctance, Pendran took a half-hearted swipe at the edge of the gleaming marble. Like a hot knife through butter, Excalibur sliced deep into the rock, then came out as easily as the astounded young man jerked it free.

He stood there, the sword dangling loosely in his fingers, and stared at the deep, narrow groove the blade had left.

Merlin's gentle voice roused him. "Thou are content, Sir Arthur, that this be no common sword?"

Pendran shook off his bewildered state of mind. "Yeah. Yeah. Sure." His hand trembled slightly as he offered the glittering weapon to the old man. "Here," he added uncertainly, "you better keep this thing. I'm liable to hurt somebody with it."

Surprisingly, Merlin made no protest. He accepted the sword and handed it to one of the waiting men-at-arms.

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"Peradventure," he said, "thy head is filled to bursting with wonder at what thou hast seen this day. Even more wonders may be revealed to thee anon."

And having given that vague prophecy, he turned to the lovely queen and respectfully inclined his head.

"An it please thee, my lady," he murmured, "I shall return Sir Arthur unto the future, from whence he was summoned."

Guinevere rose from her chair and extended a slim hand to Pendran. "I give thee God speed, Sir Arthur," she said softly. "As thou lovest thine own land, complete thy mission eftsoons, that England may bleed no more."

Pendran, hardly aware of his act, bent and kissed her fingers. He was rewarded by a ravishing smile; then, with her attendants about her, Guinevere swept regally from the room.

Wordlessly Pendran followed the old man back to the flight of steps leading down to the underground room where the former had first made his appearance in the Sixth Century. Within the chamber Merlin said:

"Resume thy sleeping garments, Sir Arthur, and return to thy pallet. When next thou waken, Guinevere and Merlin and the court of dead King Arthur will be as a well-remembered dream. Yet willst thou know it to be no dream, nor no dream is the mission thou hath vowed to complete. . . . Good den, my lord."

With Merlin and his burning torch gone, and the door closed, Pendran undressed in the dark, slipped into his pajamas and crawled onto the pallet. His mind was in so great a turmoil that he was confident sleep would be slow in coming. To his surprise, however, he had no sooner stretched out his suddenly weary body than a heavy lassitude began to steal through his mind, blotting out his thoughts and pressing against his eyes. Unconsciously he sought to fight against it—but to no avail. There followed a breath-taking sensation of falling . . . and he knew no more.

CHAPTER IV

Mission in the Night

THE white-haired, stoop-shouldered man brought his battered bicycle to a wavering halt in front of Carignan's sole chemist's shop. He dismounted stiffly, propped his vehicle against a sidewalk rubbish receptacle, and began wearily to brush the dust from his travel-stained clothing.

"Ah, good morning, monsieur." It was little, wizened Henri Mondet, the chemist shop proprietor, who called the greeting from his doorway. He crossed the sidewalk leisurely, the warm sun glinting from his completely bald head, a wisp of smoke trailing from the evil-smelling briar in his tight-lipped mouth. "Traveling is a dusty business these days, eh?"

The stranger nodded in a friendly manner. "And dust dries the throat," he amended. "I have pedaled from Montmedy—fifteen kilometers—since sun-up, and not being so young as I'd like to be, I feel the strain."

He stopped speaking to scan thoughtfully the twin row of small shops comprising Carignan's principal street, then added: "Perhaps you can recommend a respectable *estaminet* where one might obtain a cold bottle of, say, Croix D'Or."

A peculiar gleam flashed into Mondet's black eyes, to disappear immediately. "Of course—of '28 vintage, perhaps?"

The two men smiled together in perfect understanding. The stranger said, "Exactly. The very year I had in mind.

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By the way, I am Robert Hermont."

"Henri Mondet," said the little chemist, and they shook hands gravely.

"I can recommend the wine shop of Jules Levrais," Mondet went on. "Also, one may obtain lodging above his shop if one plans to remain in Carignan for a few days."

Hermont tugged at his lower lip and appeared to meditate. "It is a thought," he admitted. "A day's rest in so pleasant a setting would be most welcome." He righted his bicycle and straddled the seat. "If monsieur would kindly point out the wine shop, I shall avail myself of his kind suggestion."

The chemist pointed to the next cross street a hundred feet or so ahead of where they stood. "Turn right at the corner," he directed, "and continue for half a square. On the left you will see a white signboard bearing the words, 'Jules Levrais—Fine Wines', in red letters. You may say that I directed you to him."

Hermont set his feet to the pedals. "*Merci,* monsieur. I bid you *bon jour.*"

"*Bon jour,* Monsieur Hermont."

Puffing calmly at his reeking pipe, Henri Mondet watched the stooped shoulders and uncovered white hair of the elderly stranger until the bicycle carried him out of sight around the designated corner. Then, his thin bloodless lips tightening still more, he turned and went back into his shop.

While, in the doorway of the small restaurant across the way, *Gruppenfuehrer* Fredrich von Lemske gazed thoughtfully at the cloudless sky and rubbed his freshly shaven jowls.

THE port was good and the fishcakes excellent. Robert Hermont finished the last morsel on his plate, drained his glass and pushed away the dishes with a sigh of contentment.

Jules Levrais, a burly ox of a man with a thick mane of black hair the texture of a horse's tail, and a bristling moustache to match, shifted his bulk more comfortably in a chair across from Hermont and dug a thick-fingered hand into the vest pocket of his wrinkled black suit. With an elaborate gesture, he whipped out two cigars as black and as oily as sin itself.

"A full belly demands the solace of good tobacco, eh, Monsieur Hermont?" he growled hospitably, handing one of the cigars to his companion and thrusting the other a quarter-length into his own wide mouth.

Hermont accepted a light and leaned back to puff contentedly at the strong weed. A naked bulb above the table furnished the only light within the small room, the deepening dusk outside being cut off by the tightly drawn shades at the two windows.

"It must be close to the time our friends are to arrive," Hermont observed, breaking a brief silence.

Levrais scooped a thick, silver-cased watch from another of his vest pockets and squinted at the dial. "It is well after eight. Perhaps another ten minutes."

He proved an excellent prophet; for exactly ten minutes later a bell tinkled faintly in the outer room, denoting that someone had entered the shop. Levrais rose and left the inner room, to reappear a moment later, followed by Henri Mondet, the village chemist, and a stocky-framed, square-jawed man of indeterminate age. The latter was introduced to Hermont as Pierre Delmecourt, a farmer.

With the brisk certainty of a leader, Robert Hermont took charge of the meeting. He said, "*Bon soir,*" to Delmecourt, and motioned to the newcomers to pull chairs up to the table. That done, he raised his bushy brows at Levrais and said:

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"We are in no danger of being disturbed or overheard, monsieur?"

"I think not, Hermont," the wine seller growled. "My son is minding the shop, and Bruel is patroling the street outside these windows."

"That should be adequate . . . Messieurs, each of you knows why he is here. As members of the French Underground Movement it is our duty—and pleasure—to obstruct and destroy the invader of our country. Our lives and the lives of our families are pledged to that cause.

"Tonight, *le bon Dieu* has given us a glorious opportunity to strike the Germans a terrible blow. Four members of the Gestapo are in Carignan. One of them is the notorious *Gruppenfuehrer* von Lemske. The number of innocent Frenchmen whose deaths he has caused, directly or indirectly, is staggering. Only yesterday morning he brutally slew a man in this village—a man who, while no Frenchman, was undoubtedly an enemy of Germany, and therefore our friend."

They were hanging on his words, their faces flushed, their eyes aglow with the fervor of madmen—or patriots.

"Tonight, von Lemske and his men are dining with the ardent German sympathizer, Mayor Charles Benouvre. They are expected to leave his home quite late to return to their rooms at the Hôtel Royale. And on the way they must pass the place where one of their own bombs blew a house to bits a year ago."

"Oui," murmured Mondet; "the home of Madame Beauren, whose husband died at Verdun in the other war. The bomb killed her and her daughter-in-law and the two grand-children. *À bas l' Allemand!"*

Hermont nodded. "They shall be avenged," he declared. "They and all those others whose blood fouls von Lemske's fingers. For we four shall lie amid those ruins and wait for them to go by. And there they will die with good French bullets in their rotten bodies!"

"They may take some of us with them," Delmecourt said. There was nothing of fear in the remark; it was merely an observation.

"For France," retorted Mondet, "it will be *à bon marché!"*

All of them smiled grimly at the words. It would be a good bargain, truly, even if they killed only von Lemske and lost their own lives in the act.

"We shall wait another hour," Hermont decided. "Then, one at a time, we shall leave here and go to the rendezvous."

"Guns . . . ?" Delmecourt began slowly.

"Levrais will give each a pistol upon leaving. We don't want them in our pockets while we are sitting here. We might possibly have visitors; what kind of reputation would four peaceable Frenchmen have left if they were found to be bearing arms?"

He stretched his long frame luxuriously as though dismissing the ordeal that lay ahead, and gestured to Levrais.

"And now," he said, "perhaps our good friend will pour us a little wine with which to drink a toast to success. Let us hope that our good friend, Mayor Benouvre, is able to ply the Germans with enough wine to befuddle them. What would they say if they knew that their host, whom they think so ardent a collaborationist, is a high official of the Underground?"

THE rawboned German in the gray uniform placed his uniform cap jauntily atop his close-cropped blond hair and turned to wish his host good

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night. Waiting at the opened door were the three black-clad members of the *Totenkopfverbaende* who were his constant companions.

"An excellent dinner, monsieur," acknowledged the gray-clad von Lemske, clicking his heels and lifting his hand in a careless salute to the rotund little Frenchman in the aged dress suit. "Not often during time of war are military men fortunate enough to enjoy such food."

"The privilege has been mine, *Herr Gruppenfuehrer,*" fluttered Mayor Benouvre. "Fortunately my connections with the—ah—friends of the Occupational Forces have enabled me to obtain sufficient food."

"Yes, yes," murmured von Lemske, glancing at the dial of his wristwatch. "We Germans know how to care for our friends. . . . And now, Benouvre, we must say good night. The ten minute walk back to the hotel will help to digest our food."

The mayor peered past him at the darkness outside the open door. "It seems quite dark, *mein Herr.* Perhaps I can provide you with a lantern?"

"Not necessary," von Lemske declared. "We are accustomed to the dark, my men and I." He turned and followed his companions through the door. *"Guten Abend,* Monsieur Benouvre."

"Good night, messieurs." The town official stood in the doorway watching his guests depart. The porch light glistened on the slightly protruding teeth behind his parted lips, giving him somewhat the appearance of a good-natured half-wit. When they had reached the street, Benouvre waved his hand to them and closed the door.

His wife came into the hall from another room as he was clicking off the porch light. She was a large woman with iron-gray hair and a still beautiful face. She said, "Our guests have gone, Charles?"

"Oui," said the mayor. His once vapid expression was missing now, and there was a quiet dignity about him that would have startled his recent dinner guests. "They dined well, tonight, Marie. I expect they will have breakfast in Hell!"

THE moment the porch light went out, von Lemske drew the three Death's-head officers into the shadows of a huge tree overhanging the walk. Then he withdrew a small flashlight from a pocket of his tunic, directed its lens at the row of bushes on the opposite side of the street, and jabbed the switch rapidly three times. In response, the foliage parted and two men in dark clothing came silently across the graveled road to join the Germans. Both were inhabitants of Carignan whose names von Lemske had taken from confidential lists of French citizens who were also fascist sympathizers.

The S.D. man indicated two of the three *Schutzstaffel* officers. "Klaus, you and Rothmann continue on to the hotel along the regular route we used in coming here. Take with you our two reënforcements. Walter and I will take the opposite side of the street a few yards behind you.

"I may be taking an unnecessary precaution, but today is not the first time I have seen strangers enter a town a day behind us, only to join up with the native patriots and attempt my assassination. And just such precautions as these have saved my hide on three previous occasions."

"Jawohl, Herr Gruppenfuehrer," muttered Klaus. He and Rothmann saluted briskly and fell in behind the two newcomers.

Von Lemske waited until the four, their heels clicking sharply on the

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cement walk, were nearly half a block away before he said:

"We can cross over now. Take care to walk softly. Keep the distance between them and us about the same, and have your gun ready in your hand."

They moved silently along the heavily shadowed, tree-lined avenue, their sharp eyes catching momentary glimpses of the four men on the opposite sidewalk through an occasional break in the foliage. Other than the soft sough of air stirring the leaves overhead, there was no sound.

When they had covered three full blocks in this manner without any untoward incident, von Lemske began to think his precautions were likely to prove unnecessary after all. The Hôtel Royale was only two blocks distant, now; any ambush should have materialized before this.

The four men across the street were passing the ruins of a partially demolished, fire-gutted mansion in a weed-grown lot. Von Lemske, noting the flame-blackened side walls and mounds of rubble, smiled thinly in tribute to the Stuka dive-bomber that, a year before, had done so excellent a job. Certainly, Germany had shown the world what war——

Crack-crack-crack-crack!

Four ringing pistol shots, so closely spaced as to seem almost a single report, tore apart the silence of the night. One of the group of men on the sidewalk threw up his arms and fell in his tracks, a second clutched frantically at his left shoulder and, with his two unhit companions, dived headlong for the concealing shadows of the row of bushes between sidewalk and street.

Instantly the guns of the ambushers broke loose with a vicious crackle, pouring round upon round of hot, singing lead into the curtain of greenery masking the Germans.

VON LEMSKE, his thin angular face in grim lines that held nothing of fear, caught Watenburg's arm as he was in the act of leveling his pistol at the point where lurid flashes marked the location of the would-be assassins.

"Nein, Walter, you fool!" he growled. "You would only expose our position! Judging from the flashes from their guns, I would say there are no more than four of them. The thing for us to do is to fall back to the next intersection and circle about to take them on the flank. Come!"

Running on the balls of their feet, the two Gestapo agents fled through the shadows in the direction from whence they had come, flitted across the street at the next corner and entered the tree-filled grounds of the estate bordering the ruined house. Guided by sounds of sporadic gun-fire, they inched their way forward until, passing cautiously through a last line of heavy bushes, they emerged into open ground at the rear of the Beauren mansion.

Von Lemske indicated a tattered pile of brick that once had formed a rear wall.

"We'll have to cross to that point," he whispered calmly. "Our success depends on whether they have posted a sentry to guard their rear. Once there, we can work along the side wall and take them on their left flank."

The night hid Watenburg's face, concealing the fact that his usually pink cheeks were now a mottled gray. He muttered, "It would help if our comrades would do a little shooting and keep the *dreckige Hoellenhunder* occupied!"

The leader checked the magazine of his gun, said, *"Schnell,* Walter," and darted, his back bent in a crouch, toward the house, Watenburg at his heels.

Those thirty seconds in the open seemed the better part of an hour. Von

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Lemske felt the skin of his back crawl as though trying to slide away from the path of an enemy bullet expected at any moment. But their luck held; and when the half minute was up they were crouching at the wall's crumbling base.

For two full minutes they remained there, motionless, listening to the bark of gun fire from the front of the building. Secretly von Lemske was concerned at the lack of answering shots from the rest of his men. It was quite possible, he knew, that all four were either desperately wounded or dead. Of course, it might be a ruse to draw the ambushers from behind their barricade to investigate—a tactic Klaus had learned in other engagements of this nature.

"Let us move up, Walter," he whispered finally. "Hug the wall and keep your gun ready."

It required the better part of five minutes for them to reach a position some ten feet from the street side of the ruined dwelling. Between bursts from the ambushers' guns they caught the sounds of quiet voices and moving feet. Evidently the enemy were entrenched behind a low wall of masonry several yards in front of the wrecked house itself, leaving their flank even more exposed than von Lemske had anticipated.

A smile of contempt touched von Lemske's arrogant mouth. Always it was thus. Every occupied country had its hot-headed patriots who were long on courage and short on brains. They scrambled together some crazy concoction aimed at exterminating the conqueror, perhaps succeeded in killing a German soldier or two, then ended with their guts on a bayonet or their backs against a wall and facing a firing squad. Imagine any German-trained group leaving their flank exposed thus to the enfilade of an enemy——

Crack! SPAAANG!

THE two Gestapo agents dropped flat as a ricocheting bullet hummed overhead. Von Lemske, who had seen the flash of fire from the street, brought his lips close to Watenburg's ear and whispered:

"Easy, Walter. That came from a Luger. At least one of our men is still active."

Under cover of a fresh and prolonged burst of fire from the ambushing force, von Lemske and Watenburg succeeded in reaching the corner of the building. Removing his vizored cap, the leader, still in a kneeling position, poked his head cautiously around the corner.

Four men in civilian clothing were crouched behind a rampart of jumbled bricks, mortar and scorched timbers. All were systematically pumping pistol shots into the line of thick bushes bordering the sidewalk. Their backs were to von Lemske and presented an ideal target.

With calm deliberation, the S.D. man lifted his gun and trained it carefully on the back of a tall, stoop-shouldered man whose rumpled shock of white hair made him the most distinctive of the quartet. Slowly von Lemske's finger tightened on the trigger. . . .

And at that moment a furious fusillade broke from the street, peppering the barricade with a spray of lead.

Notwithstanding the dictates of iron nerves, von Lemske flinched slightly as the gun in his own hand went off. In its dazzling flash of fire he saw a spurt of powdered brick-dust leap from a spot barely an inch from the neck of the white-haired Frenchman; then he jerked back as the other whirled about and snapped a shot that splintered the stone where von Lemske's head had been a second before.

So precipitate was the leader's move-

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ment in avoiding the shot that he came into violent contact with Watenburg. Had the Frenchmen rushed them at that moment, both Germans would have proved easy prey. But as von Lemske struggled wildly to gain his feet, he caught the sound of running steps—a sound that became increasingly fainter.

Cursing bitterly, he regained his balance, and heedless of a possible trap, plunged around the corner into the center of the former nest of the four Frenchmen.

It was deserted now. Von Lemske froze in his tracks, ears straining to catch some indication of the route taken by the fleeing enemy. Immediately he caught the rustle of weeds and grasses and the thudding sounds of racing feet not far to his right.

Dropping to one knee he emptied his gun in that direction, at the same time raising his voice in a stentorian bellow:

"Watenburg! Klaus! Rothmann! Here—quickly!"

Watenburg came blundering into the open, nearly stumbling over the kneeling figure of his chief. With a low-voiced imprecation, von Lemske snatched the revolver from his lieutenant's hand and tossed his own emptied one over in exchange.

"Reload it!" he snapped, just as the two Death's-head officers came racing across the cleared ground to join him.

"Rothmann? Klaus?" demanded the leader.

"Ja, Excellency."

"Jawohl, Herr Gruppenfeuhrer."

"Quick! After them. They are headed for the church where we captured Albrecht yesterday. We must spread out to cover every doorway . . . Wait; where are the two who joined us at the mayor's?"

Young, round-faced Wolfgang Klaus gave the answer.

"Dead, your Excellency," he said stolidly. "One was killed by the first volley; the other was wounded at that time and evidently bled to death."

Von Lemske shrugged. "Better they than true Germans. . . . Very well, to the church!"

RUNNING with a degree of soundlessness surprising when considering their bulk, the four officers bore down on the huge stone structure of the church which loomed ahead of them not more than a city block distant. When they were less than a hundred feet away and von Lemske was on the point of giving the order to fan out to cover all sides of the building, a lance of flame stabbed from the slightly opened side door.

The *Gruppenfuehrer's* gray cap suddenly leaped from his head, jerking a startled *"Herrgott!"* from him as he and his companions flung themselves prone.

A second bullet whined overhead; then the Germans loosed a leaden barrage that drove the defender at that point to quick cover.

Von Lemske, swearing under his breath, felt around him until his fingers closed on his bullet-pierced cap. With it back in place on his head, he whispered rapid instructions to his three comrades:

"Klaus, you are to cover the main entrance; Rothmann, the side opposite this; Watenburg, the rear. Keep one eye toward the roof; they may post a man up there to pick us off. I will remain here." He consulted the luminous dial of his wristwatch. "It is 11:31. Promptly at 11:45 Klaus will toss a good-sized stone through the stained-glass window at the left of the entrance, then fire several shots through to draw the attention of those within to that point."

He fished within a pocket of his

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trousers and brought out a small, dull-finished square of metal not much larger than a cigarette lighter.

"This is one of the new type magnesium flares," he explained, handing it to Klaus. "Once you've fired the shots, pull the pin on this and toss it through the window. It will explode and burn brightly enough to make the church interior bright as day. The moment you start firing the rest of us will close in; and the flare will furnish the light for us to spot them and shoot them down. Any questions?"

The answering growls were in the negative.

"*Gut!* Then take up your positions!"

WITHIN the church, bald Henri Mondet snapped a second shot toward the dim blotch hugging the ground a hundred feet away from the door. He slammed the heavy planks to, shot the bar into place and dived aside just before four steel-jacketed bullets drilled neat holes through the thick wood.

He was grinning mirthlessly as he rejoined his companions. "I knocked the hat off one," he reported. "Maybe I hit him; I'm not sure."

"Probably not," Hermont said. "There were four of them before you fired, and four bullets came through that door just now."

The tall leader of the French patriots gave the startling impression of having been half-scalped. The thick shock of white hair that was his chief physical characteristic now hung halfway down the back of his neck, leaving a close-cropped growth of coal-black hair visible above his forehead. Due to the absence of light, however, none of his friends noticed it—and certainly he was too occupied to do so.

"What is our next move?" asked the farmer, Delmecourt, his voice steady.

"Death to the Germans!" Hermont replied promptly. "We started out tonight with that purpose in mind, and it's still to be accomplished." He stopped to mop his damp forehead, noticed then that his wig was awry, whipped it completely off and stuffed it absently into a pocket. "Mondet, take the front doors; Levrais, you and Delmecourt each take a side door, while I cover the rear. Sorry we muffed this, gentlemen," he added lightly. "It appears Fredrich von Lemske anticipated our little venture and brought up reenforcements. We were nicely outmaneuvered and shall probably lose our lives as a result. We must take the fascists with us."

"What good is it," grumbled the burly Levrais, "to remain cooped up here? When morning comes the Germans will surround the place with gendarmes and rout us out with a few bombs of tear gas."

"He is right," Delmecourt said. "Then they'll line us up against a wall and shoot us. That's no way to die, Hermont."

Hermont's smile was hidden by the darkness. "I agree with you, messieurs. However, the initiative is no longer ours. Von Lemske outgeneraled us and we are fortunate in not having lost our lives before this.

"But I do not propose that we shall stay here to die like rats in a trap. Let us give the impression that we intend making an all-night stand here. In the meantime, each of us will try to think of some ruse to get away. Then the best plan will be put into operation."

His three comrades nodded, satisfied. Hermont said, "I must get to the rear entrance to prevent a possible rush at that point."

From behind them a quiet voice said, "That will not be necessary, monsieur."

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THEY turned quickly, guns ready, to find Father Delcroix standing near the altar and regarding them soberly. In one hand he held a lighted candle, its feeble radiance almost lost in the vast blackness of the high-ceilinged nave.

With a muttered exclamation Hermont bore down upon the priest, and before the latter could protest, had snatched the candle from his fingers and extinguished its flames.

"Your forgiveness, Father," he said softly, "but the light made a perfect target for a German bullet."

"Of course," the priest said. "I should have realized that. Meanwhile, you need not concern yourselves with posting a guard at the rear of the church. The single door is of thick planks and is heavily barred. The few windows there are high above the ground and are covered with a strong steel grillwork."

Levrais gave an audible sigh of relief. Mondet said, "It is to be regretted, Father, that you have been drawn into our fight. When it is over you can inform the Germans that we compelled you to aid us. They will hardly dare to stir up unrest among the townspeople by molesting you."

"I am not afraid," Dalcroix replied simply.

Robert Hermont said, "We must find some way of escaping from here. Since there are but four of the enemy, so far as we know, and as there are only four exits, it seems reasonable that they have stationed one man at each door. Now, suppose we open one of these side doors and set up a great commotion as though intending to emerge from that point. Conceivably, the noise would draw the guard from the main entrance to assist his beleaguered companion. Then we could rush out from the front doors and get them between us and the church walls. The white stone would outline them sufficiently for us to shoot them down before they could recover their wits."

The others were silent for a moment as they weighed the plan's merits. Mondet, the first to voice an opinion, said, "It is not perfect, but I can't seem to think of a better way. I say let's try it."

"But if the guard in front has been ordered to hold that position," demurred Delmecourt, "we should be shot down before——"

CRASH!

The explosive sound of shattering glass froze the words on the farmer's lips.

"One of the front windows!" shouted Hermont, starting up the central aisle at a run. "Hurry, Mondet; we'll hold that——"

The sharp bark of a pistol sounded four times in rapid succession causing Hermont and Mondet to drop quickly to the floor as bullets whined through the broken window and *thunked* into the wooden backs of several of the pews.

From his prone position, Hermont leveled his revolver at the faint patch of lesser darkness marking the shattered pane and sent a hail of lead whistling through it. The vivid flashes from the gun's muzzle cast an eerie, flickering light that picked out the strained expressions of the five men.

Barely had the thundering echoes died than the fugitives caught a new sound: the faint clatter of metal against the uncarpeted stone at the far end of the aisle.

"Back, Mondet!" shouted Hermont, scrambling to his feet. "It may be a grenade!"

Even as he was rising, a brilliant fountain of intense light burst from the floor to dazzle the eyes of those within.

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Mondet and Hermont sprinted madly toward the altar, seemed only inches away from it and possible shelter . . .

Crack! Crack-crack-crack! Crack!

Mondet, his bald head suddenly blossoming a bright red furrow, fell heavily forward and skidded into the altar base with a dull thump. Hermont, hit in the chest, staggered into the arms of Levaris, who drew him down with the others behind the first row of pews.

FOR a full minute there was complete silence. The flare at the far end of the central aisle continued to sputter away, emanating an intense radiance.

Delmecourt inched his way closer to Jules Levrais and the wounded man in his arms. "What now, Jules?" he whispered hoarsely.

The burly one shook his head. "We can't move while that flare is burning. At least one of the Germans is standing outside that broken window waiting for us to stick our heads up."

"How is Hermont?"

The wine-shop keeper bent his head to the bloodied shirt front. "Barely breathing. Bullet went clear through him, just above the heart."

Dalcroix, the priest, who was crouching beside them, held up a hand for silence. "Listen!"

Almost at once the others heard it—a brisk crackling that seemed to come from outside the door at the northern transept.

"They're up to some devilment, all right," Levrais grumbled. Still supporting the unconscious Hermont with his left arm, he leveled his pistol with his free hand and took careful aim at the closed door.

Delmecourt pushed the gun aside before he could fire. "Wait! Look there—at the bottom crack!"

A white, vapor-like substance was seeping into the room at that point, slowly gathering in density.

"Mother of God!" gasped Levrais. "Smoke! They've fired the door!"

Silently they watched the creeping cloud of smoke grow in size. An occasional tongue of flame licked into view and the crackling sound gathered in volume.

"We can't stay here," Levrais said at last. "We're directly in line with that door; as soon as it burns away they'll shoot us down. Yet if we try to move forward, the man outside that front window will have us at his mercy."

He turned his head to where Father Delcroix was crouched. "Can you suggest something, Father?" he asked.

The priest fingered his lower lip and swept his gaze speculatively over their immediate surroundings. He said, "The door of the corridor leading to my quarters is not within range of their guns as yet. You may be able to hold them off from that point."

Levrais shot a rapid glance at the small, half-open door behind the altar. "Of course! They could come at us from only one direction then!"

Their progress to the corridor door was hampered somewhat in getting Hermot's limp, unconscious form across the open floor. But they made it without mishap; and once inside, with the door closed, Delcroix relighted his candle and stuck it in its own grease atop one of the display cases lining the wall.

They placed the dying man on the floor and Delmecourt removed his coat and made a pillow for the dark-haired head. Without the wig Hermont was revealed as a young man, with strong rugged features that came close to being handsome. His cheeks were very white now, under their tan, and his breath was shallow and rapid.

"He's nearly gone," said Delmecourt. "A little wine might revive him for his last moments in this life."

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"Perhaps, monsieur," Levrais sputtered, "a moth made this hole!"

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Father Delcroix got to his feet. "I'll get a bottle," he said, and went through the doorway leading to his rooms. A moment later he reappeared with a dust-covered bottle and a crystal goblet. "Here," he said, holding them out to Levrais, "you had better pour it. My fingers are a bit unstea——"

AS ONE sound came the sharp report of a pistol, a dull *thwack* and the tinkle of breaking glass. A small round hole had magically appeared in the door; and Delcroix was staring with stupefied eyes at the shattered bit of glass stem remaining in his fingers.

Wordlessly, visibly shaken by their narrow escape, they moved nearer to one wall out of line with the door. The wounded man began to mutter deliriously.

The wine-shop keeper expertly uncorked the bottle, said, "Too bad you didn't bring a second glass, Father," and slid an arm under Hermont's shoulders, lifting him to drink from the bottle's neck.

"Wait," Delcroix said. He rose, opened the display case nearest them and removed a thick-stemmed, squat goblet fashioned from silver. "Use this," he suggested, handing it to Lavrais.

Jules used a portion of the amber liquid as a rinse, then poured a small amount of fresh wine into the cup and held the brim to Hermont's lips. The dying man gagged a bit at first; then gulped down the remainder without effort.

Levrais let him down gently, said, "I can use some of that myself," and took a prodigious pull directly from the bottle. He wiped his lips with the back of one hairy forearm and handed the half empty bottle to the waiting Delmecourt.

The shop-keeper stared with puzzled eyes at the silver goblet before placing it on the floor. Odd how his fingers had tingled slightly while he had been holding it . . .

"What are we doing here?" Hermont asked.

"Waiting," Levrais began automatically, "for the Germans to rush——" His voice broke under the impact of sudden realization and he jerked his head around to join the others in staring at their wounded friend.

Hermont had pushed himself up into a sitting position, and seemed quite puzzled at the awe in his comrades' expressions.

Jules Levrais was first to recover. "*Mon Dieu,* Robert!" he cried, springing up and passing his arm about the other's shoulders. "You are sorely wounded, my friend; you must not exert precious strength."

"Nonsense!" barked Hermont, shrugging off the arm. "I fainted, perhaps; it is nothing. Tell me quickly what has taken place."

But the seller of wines was not to be silenced so easily. With a frantic gesture he tore apart Hermont's shirt-front and leveled a dramatic finger at the tanned flesh beneath.

"Then look for yourself!" he pleaded. "There is the ho——" The sentence died with a smothered gasp.

The bullet hole was gone!

Father Delcroix crossed himself. "*Deo gratias!*" he muttered and bowed his head.

"A—a miracle!" Levrais stuttered. He poked a finger through the blood-drenched material where the bullet had emerged. "You see that, my friend Hermont? Perhaps you will say that a *moth* ate this hole?"

Hermont stared at his reddened shirt, then reached an unsteady hand for the wine bottle. "Let us talk of it later;" he said, pouring wine into the silver goblet.

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"Now we must evolve a scheme to escape this *cul-de-sac.*"

WHILE he sipped thoughtfully from the cup, the others told of what had occurred after he had fallen. Mention of Mondet's death caused him to tighten his lips with pain, for he had admired and respected the bald little chemist.

"Delmecourt," he said, when the recital was done, "go back to the rear exit and attempt to learn if it is under guard. Be careful not to get yourself shot in doing so."

Silently the farmer rose and left the corridor.

Hermont felt of his pockets. "It seems I have lost my gun," he said ruefully. "It is hardly possible but perhaps Father Delcroix has one in his quarters?"

The priest shook his head regretfully. "God and guns have nothing in common," he said.

"Parbleu!" exploded Jules, slapping his thick thigh. "I had forgotten!" He thrust a ham-like hand into one of his capacious pockets and drew out a gleaming pistol. "Here is your gun, friend Hermont. I took it from you as you fell into my arms out there."

The tall Frenchman snatched it. "You are a jewel, Levrais. A trifle rough, perhaps—but still a jewel!" He filled the empty chambers with ammunition from his pocket, and was on the point of making some remark when a sudden flurry of gunfire came from outside the rear of the church.

A few seconds later Delmecourt entered the corridor.

"We cannot leave by the rear, Monsieur Hermont," he reported. "They have placed one of those accursed flares outside and it lights up the ground for yards around. The guard there could spot a mouse coming through the door."

Hermont nodded, bowed his head in thought for a minute or two; then without a word he rose and extinguished the wavering candle flame, plunging the room into complete darkness. A faint tingling in the fingers of his right hand reminded him that he was still holding the silver cup, and obeying a vague impulse, he thrust it into a side pocket of his coat.

"It is time," he said, his tone quite casual, "for us to act. By now the fascists undoubtedly have taken up positions inside the church where they can cover our door. I am going to open the door, step through and start shooting. Their return fire will disclose their positions. You two must then open up with your guns to keep the Germans off balance so that they will not be able to return effectively our fire. Thus we may be able to gain the burned-out doorway and escape into the night."

The impenetrable blackness hid his companions' expressions. Levrais said, "How many times in one night do you expect to die, Hermont?" Delmecourt scraped his feet uneasily against the stone floor and said nothing.

"Can you think of a better way, Levrais?" Hermont asked steadily.

The shop-keeper's "No," was a growl. "But," he added, "why should you be the one to go out first? You'd make too big a target!"

Hermont chuckled. "And you are too wide for us to shoot around, Jules! No; the three of you appointed me as leader and, as such, I must lead. Get ready; I am about to open the door."

Father Delcroix said, "There must be some way I can aid in this, Monsieur Hermont."

"Other than offering a prayer for our souls," the tall Frenchman replied promptly, "you can do nothing, Father —except stay out of range."

They took their places before the closed door, judging positions by touch-

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ing one another. Hermont, gun leveled at his side, cautiously wrapped the fingers of his left hand around the knob, took a deep breath—and jerked open the door.

GUNS blazed instantly. A black-uniformed enemy, skull-and-crossboned cap at a rakish angle, fell face forward with a bullet through his head, a cigarette still pasted to his lower lip. From behind Hermont, Delmecourt grunted, said, *"N'importe,"* and slumped down with German lead in his heart. Another Death's-head trooper and von Lemske were kneeling behind a pew half way up the nave, their pistol flashes punctuating the wavering light of the slow-burning flare.

For the Frenchmen death was but seconds away. Hermont had realized from the first that there was only one chance in a million that any of them would make the doorway alive. From behind those wooden ramparts, von Lemske and his companion would be able to shoot down the fugitives with little danger to themselves—pick them off like clay pigeons at a trap-shoot.

Levrais' gun-hammer clicked futilely against an empty shell. With a muffled curse he flung the useless weapon at his hidden foe and leaped, with arms wide-thrown, squarely in front of Robert Hermont.

Thus died Jules Levrais—deliberately sacrificing the last few moments of his life that a man whom he had never heard of twenty-four hours before might add those precious seconds to his own life.

Hermont, his own gun empty now, stood there, alone and unprotected, and coolly thrust a steady hand into his coat pocket for fresh ammunition. He saw two black gun-muzzles trained on him from across the church, knew he would never live to reload his weapon—and felt his fingers brush against the bowl of the silver cup.

There followed a soundless flash of enduring light—more brilliant, more intense than human eyes could bear—and which appeared to center where Hermont was standing!

The two Germans cried out, involuntarily dropping their guns to mask seared eyes with uplifted arms. And when, minutes later, their eyes were able to function once more, Robert Hermont had disappeared.

CHAPTER V

Mission with Bombs

SUNLIGHT, warm and bright, streaming through the open window, awakened Arthur Pendran. For some little while he lay in that pleasantly comatose state that comes with good health and knowledge that the rent is paid.

And then, suddenly and clearly, came full memory of the previous night's events, his eyes snapped open and he was fully awake.

He stretched luxuriously under the light-weight cover and ran his fingers through the wealth of tousled red hair on his head. "Whew!" he whistled aloud. "What a dream!" He noticed the copy of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* closed and lying on the night-table beside the bed. "That's what I get for drinking bourbon and reading a book, both on the same night!"

And yet . . . had it been a dream? Every detail was so sharply etched on his memory! There was nothing of the hazy distortion, the gaps in continuity, that were characteristic of dreams. Perhaps he had actually been whisked back to——

But that was ridiculous! He dismissed the absurdity from his mind and

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turned his head to glance at the bed-side clock on the night-table. Eighty-thirty. And he was supposed to call for Mary Graham at nine. Time for a quick shower and shave, and a cab to her hotel.

Pendran whipped back the coverlet and sprang off the bed; then he said, "Ouch!" sharply and sank down onto the edge of the bed to examine his bruised foot.

For several minutes he sat there, rubbing his throbbing instep and staring in bewildered disbelief at the object on which he had trod. No longer did he seek to dismiss the incredible events of the previous night as alcohol-induced dreams; there on the floor before him lay incontrovertible proof to the contrary.

"Excalibur!" he muttered finally. "The favorite weapon of my revered ancestor! Looks as though old man Merlin can't take no for an answer."

He bent and picked up the sword by its rippled-gold hilt, finding the weapon to be light and graceful in his hand. Evidently whatever "spell" Merlin had used to counteract its weight was still in force.

He continued to sit there, swinging the sword idly in his hand, his mind struggling to adjust itself to an acceptance of what was patently an impossibility. He, Arthur Pendran, was pledged to journey nearly five thousand miles, one way, to the heart of a war-torn continent in search of the Holy Grail—itself no more than an undocumented legend. How he was to get there and exactly where he was to look once he had arrived, were matters for which he had no answers.

Rising at last, he tossed the fabled sword of King Arthur onto the crumpled bed-clothing and went into the hallway to use the phone.

Mary's voice, fresh and warm as the sun outside, came over the wire.

" 'Morning, Art. Wonderful day for flying. I just finished dressing. How soon will you be here?"

"Uh . . . Mary . . ."

Solicitude came into her voice. "What's wrong, darling? Not suffering from a hangover, are you?"

He couldn't very well tell her of his visit with people of the Sixth Century. Or she'd come tearing over with a psychiatrist trailing from either hand! He swallowed, said:

"Look, Mary, how about coming over here? There's something I've got to tell you. Bring a few rolls from the bakery; I'll make some coffee and we'll talk things over at breakfast."

There was a brief silence at the other end of the wire. Then, very quietly, Mary said, "I'll be there within half an hour, Art. Goodbye."

MARY Graham broke off a bit of her roll and buttered it daintily. She said lightly, "I'll say this for you, Arthur Pendran: when you dream, you really put your heart and soul into it!"

Pendran reached moodily for the electric percolator and poured his third cup of black coffee. Mary and he were seated on opposite sides of the tiny table in his breakfast nook. He had just finished a somewhat dogged recital of the previous night's events, his attitude becoming increasingly defensive as the incredulity became stronger in the girl's expression.

He took a sip of the hot liquid and set the cup back in its saucer with a hand that trembled a bit. "Mary," he said, "you've got to believe that everything really happened the way I told it. Oh, I'll admit it *sounds* like a nightmare; I thought the same thing when I first woke up. Then I found the thing that proves it was no dream—that actually I *was* back in the Sixth Century!"

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Mary's dark blue eyes widened a bit. She was wearing a one-piece dress of sea-green linen, and her shoulder-length, honey-colored hair was drawn back with a small bow of the same hue as her dress. She looked cool and clean and slim and fragile—and altogether lovely. She said:

"What could you possibly have found that would prove such an impossible story to be true? Perhaps a lock of Guinevere's golden hair?"

He refused to respond to her bantering tone in a like vein. Instead he rose from his chair, said, "I'll show you," and left the room. Mary watched him go, a tiny vertical line creasing the tanned skin between her eyes. It was strange and a bit discomforting to find that Art insisted she accept as gospel the wild tale he had recounted. She caught herself wondering if he was beginning to crack under the strain of trying to gain acceptance as a combat pilot for Uncle Sam.

Presently, Pendran came back. At sight of what he carried, Mary Graham gasped aloud and got unsteadily to her feet.

"Art!" she exclaimed, pointing a wavering finger at the gleaming length of steel and gold he carried. "Where in the world did you get that sword?"

Arthur placed the shining weapon gingerly on the table and resumed his chair. "That's Excalibur," he told her wearily. "The sword of King Arthur. I found it beside my bed when I got up this morning. Now you know why I've been insisting my dream wasn't a dream—if you see what I mean."

She nodded slowly, her eyes glued to the sword in front of her. "No wonder you refuse to believe it was a dream. It—it scares me a little, Arthur."

"Me too," Pendran admitted gloomily. "Also it shows that I've got to go Holy Grailing."

"But how are you going to get into Gaul—France? And even if you do get there—even if you get your hands on the real Grail—how will you know it *is* the real one?"

"The true Grail makes your fingers tingle . . . so Merlin told me," Pendran said. "Which is a heck of a way to identify anything!"

He stared hard at the sword for a moment, then closed his eyes and took a shuddering breath. "I'm not a drinking man," he added morosely, "but I need a stimulant!"

Rising, he crossed to the kitchen door, reappearing a moment later with a squat bottle of bourbon and a frosted bottle of ginger-ale. He mixed a pair of drinks, using a generous amount of the liquor in each, and handed one to the girl.

FOR a while they sat and sipped from the glasses, silently occupied with their thoughts. Mary, without saying as much in so many words, had come to accept the fact that Arthur Pendran was a recently returned visitor to the Sixth Century. The sword had done that—no one could have looked upon it and still questioned its authenticity.

"Arthur," she began finally, lifting her eyes to the young man across the table, "couldn't you——"

At sight of the transfigured face of Arthur Pendran, she fell suddenly silent. It was almost as though he had been stricken by some strange paralysis, with his jaw hanging, his eyes fairly popping, the glass in his hand midway between the table top and his lips. Her heart pounding, she followed the direction of his frozen stare to discover what had affected him so.

He was staring at the ginger-ale bottle!

"Art Pendran!" she exclaimed, nettled. "What in the world is the matter

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with you? Don't tell me you see Sir Launcelot hiding behind that ginger-ale label!"

Pendran, his eyes shining, turned to her. "I've got it, Mary! How stupid I was, not to think of it before!"

"What *are* you talking about?"

"That label on the ginger-ale bottle!"

She stared at it. "But——"

"But me no buts! What does it say?"

"On the label?"

"On the label!"

In a dazed voice she began to read aloud. "Canada Dry ging——"

"That's enough," cut in the red-haired young man. "Good lord, Mary, don't you get it? Canada! Haven't you ever heard of the R.C.A.F.?"

Comprehension began to dawn in her blue eyes. "Why, of course. You mean that you are——"

"—going to join the Royal Canadian Air Force," he finished. "At least, I'm going to try to. Canada's *in* the war, Mary; they're not going to be so particular about my thumb and my tendency to be color-blind. Once they are convinced that I know my business, they should be willing to take me on my own terms; namely, that I be sent immediately to England to pilot a fighter plane or a bomber."

"And then what?" she asked quietly.

"Well . . ." He rose and began to pace back and forth in the narrow confines of the dinette. "I can't answer that right now, Mary. In one way or another I'll have to get into France and start hunting for that cup."

"You mean you'd desert?"

He stopped in mid-stride. "Desert? Of course not!"

"Then how . . . ?"

"I don't know—yet," he said impatiently. "I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. The way will turn up."

"How soon will—will you be leaving for Canada, Art?"

DESPITE his preoccupation, Pendran caught the slight tremor in the girl's voice. Without a word he went over to her, took her hands in his and drew her from the chair. Then he put his arms gently around her, and for a moment they stood thus, neither speaking.

"Easy does it, darling," he murmured at last. "You've known for a long time that this was coming. Getting in some branch of an air force, I mean. We'll run down to spend the day with Jean and Hugo in St. Louis. I'll leave for Canada tomorrow."

Mary, her voice muffled against his shoulder, said, "I know. It's just that I'll miss you, you big lug!"

Pendran chuckled aloud and hugged her until she gasped. "That's what I wanted to hear you say," he said. "Just keep it in mind while I'm away, and don't go marrying any of those air-line wolves. I wouldn't like that, Mary."

She smiled, and murmured, "Neither would I," cryptically.

They cleared away the breakfast dishes, confining their talk to monosyllables. That done, Pendran took up the mighty sword, symbolic of a long-dead era, and regarded it thoughtfully.

Mary, watching him, said, "Going to take it with you to Europe, Sir Arthur?"

He grinned. "Pilots aren't wearing 'em this season. Nope; I'll hang it over the mantel like Granddad used to do with his flintlock. Merlin will probably send for it when I get back."

Into Mary's mind, unbidden, came the thought, "*If* he gets back!" Quickly she turned away that he might not see the tears that sprang to her eyes.

* * *

FLYING OFFICER ARTHUR PENDRAN of the Royal Canadian

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Air Force caught a momentary glimpse of the night-shrouded English Channel as the small formation of medium bombers and their protecting fighters left Britain's coast-line behind.

He throttled down the powerful engine of the single-seater Hawker Hurricane slightly to hold his position as rear cover for the bomber group. This was the early morning hours of July 23, 1941—exactly two months to the day that he had entered the war under Canada's flag.

Under his breath he hummed the opening bars of a music-hall ballad that he had picked up while on leave the night before. His mind, however, was far afield.

This was *the* night! Within the space of a few short hours, if his plans did not miscarry, he would be afoot somewhere along the coast of northern France. This was his fifth flight over the German occupied country, and even so slight a familiarity gave him confidence to put his mad scheme into operation.

Not that he intended to endanger the other planes in tonight's raid. Never! They were manned by his friends, his comrades-in-arms. Once the bombers had laid their eggs on the oil dumps and railroad terminus at Charleville, a French town not far from the Belgian border, he would remain in formation to cover the return to the Channel. Then, and only then, would he simulate engine trouble that would make it compulsory for him to turn back for a forced landing in hostile territory. He hated the thought of sacrificing one of Britain's badly needed fighters, but salved his conscience by reminding himself that recovery of the Grail was worth more to England than thousands of planes.

He realized that anyone hearing the details of his "dream" and informed of what he was about to attempt, would regard him as a madman. But Arthur Pendran was filled with the faith that comes only to one who has witnessed a miracle; and whatever doubt there had been in his mind on that morning after his visit to the past, had been driven out of sight by the mighty sword of a legendary monarch.

Ahead of him, now, stretched an endless black line that marked the coast of France. His altimeter needle wavered at eight thousand feet—some two thousand less than the advance escort fighters flying at "high cover."

From the black bulk of level land ahead long lances of light suddenly appeared and began to sweep the skies like probing forefingers. Down there, Pendran knew, enemy gun crews were leaping to battle stations at anti-aircraft batteries, hoarse orders were being bellowed over field telephone wires to fighter airfields, and crews of Focke-Wulf and Messerschmitt intercepters were wheeling their planes onto unlighted runways.

Yet when all that assembled German defensive power was flung against this small-numbered force of sky invaders, it must not be permitted to keep the bombers from reaching their target at Charleville.

AND then, in what appeared to be one simultaneous convulsion, a quarter-section of Hell seemed to engulf the entire British formation. Snarling enemy planes appeared out of nowhere to converge on their prey; machine guns and nose cannon began to spray the heavens with death, tracer bullets wove majestic patterns of fire; and exploding ack-ack shells dotted the sky with expanding black and white puffs of smoke.

One of these latter burst violently not far below Pendran's craft, causing it to

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buck madly while shrapnel slapped viciously against the fuselage. He heeled over sharply, then sent the plane into a wide banking turn that was to pull him back into position . . . and found a sleek-lined Messerschmitt bearing down upon him from above!

"Goddamn!" shouted the amazed Pendran. An involuntary jerk on his controls sent the Hurricane into a sharp dive, just as the glass cowling above his head blossomed with a neat row of bullet holes. Not daring to continue the dive, lest he become certain prey for the ack-ack guns below, he forced his ship into a tight outside loop that strained the wings unmercifully. For a few seconds blackness swirled through his brain under the awful pressure; then magically his head cleared and he found himself close behind, and slightly above, the Messerschmitt. Sight and action came together; a hail of lead poured from the Hurricane's wings, and a moment later the German plane, enveloped in smoke and flame, began its long plunge to the ground below.

Meanwhile, the Luftwaffe continued its attack with unrelenting ferocity, while the Allied formation held doggedly to its course. Pendran, still sweating from the close call, jockied his Hurricane back into position and awaited the next onslaught.

It did not come immediately. As the minutes passed and the dark countryside far below continued to slip smoothly into the west, Pendran found himself becoming strangely numbed to the insane cacophony of machine-gun and cannon fire mingled with the roar of motors and the screaming whine of diving planes. The ack-ack fire from below had slackened off considerably since the heavily fortified coastal defenses were left behind; but the searchlight batteries seemed as numerous as ever, and there appeared to be a constantly increasing number of Nazi fighter planes. Thus far, at least, it did not appear that the latter had managed to get at the bombers themselves.

Charleville could not be far ahead, now. At any moment, Pendran realized, the flight leader's voice would come through the headphones with information that tonight's target was sighted.

But Arthur Pendran was destined never to accompany his companions over that target. Nor was his failure to do so the result of some masterful bit of enemy strategy; instead, very prosaically, the Hurricane's fuel line clogged suddenly, petrol ceased flowing, the engine coughed, sputtered and, heedless of Pendran's frantic efforts, went dead.

Instantly the plane began to lose speed, and a moment later Pendran found himself trailing his squadron. Already, two Messerschmitt fighters had glimpsed his plight and were bearing down upon him.

There was no time to rail against the perversity of fate. The American swore with brief savagery, shoved the wheel foreward to send the Hurricane into a powerless dive, thrust back the glass cowl and leaped into space just as enemy guns sent riddling streams of lead into the crippled ship.

For five thousand feet his body plummeted earthward unimpeded; then, with the ground still two thousand feet away, he pulled the parachute ring. The resulting jerk left him dazed for several moments, and when full possession of his senses returned, he found that he was dropping rapidly toward the upreaching branches of a heavily wooded valley.

He clawed frantically at the 'chute lines in an effort to alter his course toward a narrow strip of meadowland bordering the forest. To plunge into that closely woven tangle of foliage

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could result only in serious injury or death. At best, it was going to be terribly close. The blackness of a moonless night made accurate judgment almost an impossibility, the impenetrable shadows making it difficult to decide exactly where plain and forest met.

Suddenly he knew that he was not going to reach open ground. Up from the darkness stretched the motionless limbs of a great tree, higher than its neighbors, and into which it appeared he was certain to crash.

An instant later he felt his feet scrape heavily against a rough surface; he gave one last despairing yank at the shroud-lines, something struck his temple a sickening blow, a whirlpool of pain swirled into his mind and consciousness left him.

CHAPTER VI

"We Shoot Spies!"

THERE were tired lines about the eyes and mouth in *Gruppenfuehrer* Fredrich von Lemske's thin face as he mounted the stone steps to the church doors. The two Death's-head guards accompanying him likewise showed evidences of strain resulting from the previous night's battle with four members of the French Underground.

They found Father Dalcroix assisting the village carpenter in replacing the side door burned away by the Germans. The thin, gaunt-faced priest said, "Good afternoon, messieurs," politely and went with them to the opposite side of the church, out of earshot of the carpenter.

The priest and the S.D. man sat down in one of the pews, while the two black-uniformed guards remained standing stiffly at attention near by. Dalcroix noticed that much of the Nazi officer's natty appearance of yesterday was missing; his gray uniform was stained and wrinkled and there was a bullet hole through the peak of his cap. Nor was his former arrogance so evident as it had been when he and his men entered the church in search of the man known as Paul Albrecht.

"Dalcroix," von Lemske began, his tone mild, almost friendly, "I'd like for you to tell me the names of the four men who made the brutal and unprovoked attack upon my companions and me late last night."

Dalcroix' eyebrows lifted. "I understood that the bodies had been identified."

"The bodies, yes. But, you see, there are only three bodies; there were four attackers."

"I see," Dalcroix said laconically.

Von Lemske waited a moment, then, as the priest showed no indication of continuing, said:

"The dead men have been named as Henri Mondet, Jules Levrais and Pierre Delmecourt—all members of the Communist Party. I want the name of the fourth man—the one who escaped."

"Strange," mused the priest, "that in all the years I knew those men—knew them and called them friends—never once did I suspect any one of them of being a Communist."

"Of course they were Communists," the S.D. man snapped, his face suddenly red. "Behind all these treacherous, cowardly attacks on law and order you will find the bloody hand of the Kremlin. Our beloved Fuehrer saw that fact most clearly; it is one of the reasons why he declared war on Russia a month ago."

"I see," Dalcroix said again.

"Of course you do," von Lemske said, his tone conciliatory. "You are intelligent; one in your position naturally would be. And now, if you will furnish the name of the missing assas-

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sian, my men and I will be going."

"Then the fourth man has not as yet been apprehended?" the priest asked innocently.

Von Lemske's control slipped a bit. "No! Otherwise I shouldn't be asking you for his name."

"I see."

"Who—was—he?"

Dalcroix appeared shocked by the cold savagery behind the question. "He was a stranger to me, monsieur. I never saw him before last night."

"But you heard those with him mention his name!" growled the enraged officer.

"Did I?" the priest asked blandly. "If so, I have forgotten it. You see, there was so much confusion, and guns were going off and bullets flying about. . . ."

VON Lemske bounded to his feet, face purpling with rage. "Let me remind you, Dalcroix, that I am not entirely satisfied with your part in this affair. It is quite possible that you aided those traitors during last night's action."

"And allow me to remind *you*," Dalcroix said smoothly, "that I am in no way interested in political differences. My interest and services lie with Almighty God, monsieur, and——"

With an angry gesture, von Lemske whipped the gray uniform cap from his head and pointed a shaking finger at the small hole in the crown.

" 'Political differences' be damned!" he snarled. "This hole was left by a bullet, my friend; a bullet that, had it been half an inch lower, would have taken my life. Is that a matter of political differences?

"Manfred Rothmann lies dead. He was slain by one of an insane band of murderers in a country that is not now at war with the German Reich. Manfred Rothmann was a German, monsieur—a member of the race appointed by God and by Fuehrer to rule the earth. Do you think that a single member of that gang of madmen will be permitted to go unpunished?

"Within an hour after the surviving member of that band fled from this church, every member of the German Occupational Forces within a radius of fifty kilometers was warned to be on the lookout for him. As a result there is a ring of steel closing in on that criminal—a ring that will tighten about his throat before another sunrise!"

"None doubts your efficiency, monsieur," Dalcroix murmured, unmoved by the outburst.

Von Lemske eyed him narrowly for a moment, then shrugged and said coldly:

"I should like to look over the scene of last night's action, Father Dalcroix. It is possible that some clue to the fourth man's identity may turn up—some article dropped during the heat of the engagement."

The priest rose to his feet. "As you wish, monsieur."

With axiomatic Prussian thoroughness, von Lemske and his two companions combed the church interior. Empty cartridge shells were collected, to be matched with the dead men's guns; dusty footprints were measured; bullet holes in the furnishings were probed; blood stains were examined.

When the investigation had reached the corridor leading to Father Dalcroix' quarters, von Lemske noticed a half-filled wine bottle and the shards of a drinking-glass on the floor under one of the display cases lining the walls. He stooped and took up the bottle, sniffed at its contents.

"How did this get here?" he asked.

Father Dalcroix explained briefly, omitting mention of Hermont's wound

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and the miracle which followed. The German officer heard him out without interruption, then said, "You seem to have the qualifications of a perfect host, Father," in a tone that was close to being threatening.

The contents of the display case itself caught his attention then, and after a moment's study, he reached in and brought out one of the small white cards placed in front of the several exhibits.

"Silver goblet," he read aloud. "Roman. Dating from about the First Century. Unearthed from Roman ruins near Exeter, Devon, England. . . . It appears, Dalcroix, that you have lost one of your relics. There is no cup here such as this card describes."

DALCROIX appeared puzzled momentarily, then his faced cleared. "Of course. I had forgotten. One of the — er — Communists used it as a drinking glass for the wine. He must have taken it with him."

The German leader tapped the card thoughtfully against his fingers. "H'mm. Yet no such object was found in the possession of any of those we killed. Therefore the man who escaped must have it. Excellent! When he is picked up, that cup will serve to prove him to be the man we want."

In the back of the *Gruppenfuehrer's* mind a thought was struggling for recognition—a thought that had something to do with a cup . . .

The sound of hurried feet approaching the corridor door caught his attention, and a moment later a dust-stained German soldier in a dark-green field-uniform came through the doorway and briskly saluted the S.D. officer.

"*Herr Gruppenfuehrer* Fredrich von Lemske?"

"*Ja.*"

His face woodenly expressionless, the courier reached into a leather dispatch case attached to his waist and brought out a sealed envelope, which he handed to von Lemske.

"*Eine Nachricht für Sie, Herr Gruppenfuehrer,*" he said.

While the others looked on, the man in gray ripped open the envelope and hurriedly scanned through the enclosure.

By the time he had finished, his eyes were glowing and a grim smile of satisfaction tugged at the corners of his thin lips. He stuffed the missive into a pocket of his uniform, said a few words in German to the messenger, who snapped a salute and hurried out, then turned to the priest.

"A further example of our efficiency, Father Dalcroix," he said affably. "That was a message from an officer of our garrison at Charleville. It seems that a horse was stolen from a farmer a few kilometers north of Carignan early this morning. Believing it possible that the missing assassin had taken it, I gave instructions that a sharp look-out be kept for the animal. The message informs me that the horse, abandoned by the thief, has been found near Charleville, and that apprehension of the rider is expected at any moment."

A wave of compassion for the hunted man welled up within Father Dalcroix and he made no reply lest his voice betray his feelings. But von Lemske had turned away and was issuing orders to his two companions.

"Klaus. Watenburg," he said, in the guttural tongue of his country. "Get over to the hotel and pack my luggage. Put it in the car, then call for me at the residence of Mayor Benouvre. *Schnell!*"

The men in black saluted smartly, clicked their heels, said, "*Jawohl, Herr Gruppenfuehrer,*" in unison, and dived for the doorway.

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PRIVATE Hermann Wagner, infantryman, Seventh German Army, had an unshakable premonition that this night would shape the future course of his destiny. As he inched his way cautiously through the thick undergrowth of the forest-filled valley, pausing frequently to prod a tangle of foliage large enough to conceal a human fugitive, the words of *Leutnant* Schroeder came back to his mind:

"I can safely guarantee that any among you who brings in a British airman, alive or dead, will be given an elevation in rank."

The railroad yards at Charleville had taken a heavy pounding hardly an hour ago, and returning German fighter pilots reported that several English planes had been wrecked and their crews forced to bail out. And Private Hermann Wagner was one of the group selected to round up those men.

It would be good to become an officer —even a noncommissioned one. Then would he show such as Gottfreid Schwenke and Hans Hoff a thing or two! They would have to treat him with respect instead of laughing at him and making him the butt of their practical jokes.

The heavy darkness here, under the trees, made him a bit uneasy. It would be so easy for one of the enemy to shoot him from behind some tree before he, Wagner, could realize what was taking place. If only the moon were out—although even its light would hardly be able to penetrate the thick foliage overhead.

In front of him, now, the darkness seemed to be lifting a bit, and a few minutes later he reached the edge of a rather wide strip of open ground. For a little while he remained within the bordering fringe of forest, his eyes seeking to locate some indication that one of the enemy fliers was in the vicinity.

Satisfied, finally, that the strip of meadowland was empty of life, Wagner stepped cautiously into the open and moved slowly forward, keeping close to the fringe of trees. He moved on his toes, body crouched, the bayonet-equipped rifle in his hands ready for instant use.

Now an arm of the forest jutted out ahead of him. Bearing to his right, he skirted the line of trees, made the turn —and came to a sudden, startled stop, his heart leaping with shock.

Lying on the ground in a tangle of cloth and ropes was the motionless figure of a man in a flying suit!

Private Hermann Wagner swallowed hard and gripped his rifle more firmly. There was nothing to be afraid of, he told himself. The Englishman was stunned; otherwise he would not be lying there without having first rid himself of the tangled parachute.

But what if he were pretending to be unconscious? Perhaps he was waiting for an opportunity to pull a gun? It would not do to take chances; he wanted his reward and he wanted his own life as well. And *Leutnant* Schroeder had said to bring in any captive, "alive or dead."

His hands trembled a little as he leveled the bayonet. Surprising how difficult it was to force oneself to kill a man who was incapable of resisting.

Shaking off his momentary hesitancy, he swung back the rifle butt, then brought his arms down in a savage thrust that sent the cold, sharp steel blade squarely at the other's heart.

WHAT it was that brought Flying Officer Arthur Pendran to full consciousness was something he could never explain. One moment he was lying senseless on the flat of his back; the next, his eyes were watching with stunned horror as the broad blade of a

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naked bayonet, wielded by the shadowy figure of a man in uniform, came at his heart with vicious swiftness!

Involuntarily, he flung up his right arm in what must be a futile effort to parry the savage thrust. And in that second he felt the fingers of that hand close around cold metal as a giant sword materialized instantly before his astounded eyes!

There followed a sharp *clang!* as the descending bayonet struck the sword's blade and was turned aside to bury itself harmlessly in the ground beside the fallen flier; then came a hoarse, gurgling cry as the point of Pendran's weapon ripped into the attacker's throat, neatly decapitating him.

Pendran rolled aside in time to avoid the headless body as it collapsed to earth. Slowly he raised himself to a sitting position, his dazed mind closed to everything but the incredible fact that in his hand he held the fabled sword of a legendary king.

"Excalibur!" he breathed. "I'm dreaming again! You're hanging over a mantel in Chicago!"

The faint light of overhead stars winked at him from the mirror-like surface of steel. And then it was as though a fog came between his eyes and that gleaming blade, causing the latter to become tenuous . . . transparent . . . nothing . . .

The sword was gone!

For fully two minutes, Arthur Pendran sat staring at his empty hand, still cupped to fit a now nonexistant hilt. He took a deep, shuddering breath, then, and climbed weakly to his feet. . . .

By the time he had divested himself of the parachute lines and straightened his flying-garb, he was his old self again. Now that the soil of France was under his feet, he was free to begin his search for the object he had sworn to find. Long before this moment his course of action had been arrived at; first, he must establish contact with a French family and request that its members hide him from the Germans.

It was entirely possible, of course, that he might pick the wrong Frenchman and get himself turned over to the enemy. But, he told himself, the odds were in his favor on that point, for most of the natives hated their conquerors and were quick to help Germany's foes.

From a pocket of his uniform, he dug out a revolver, made certain it was loaded and ready for use, then struck out in a northerly direction, hugging the forest shadows.

Two hours later, he came suddenly upon a dirt road that cut a straight line through the forest. After a moment's debate, Pendran decided to move parallel with the road, thereby changing his course to due east. The heavy darkness and complete absence of threatening sounds were reassuring, and he increased his gait, anxious to find haven at some farmhouse before dawn.

Perhaps his growing confidence made him careless; for, as he reached a bend in the road, he rounded the turn without first making certain the trail ahead was deserted.

There followed a sudden blur of movement directly in front of him; and as he instinctively threw up his hands, something glittered in a sweeping arc aimed at his head.

The dull, indistinct figure in front of him exploded in a vivid burst of searing pain as the gleaming object caught him above the left temple. Even as he went down, Pendran sought to close his fingers about the throat of his unidentified assailant. He felt his fingers brush helplessly against cloth; then a vortex of agony sucked consciousness from his mind and he knew

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no more . . .

THERE was a hard lump pressing against his chest. Without opening his eyes, he tried to draw away from contact with whatever was gouging him; but the movement sent nauseating pain through his hurt head and he gave up the attempt.

Little by little the throbbing ache began to leave his temples, until finally he dared to open his eyes. In the grayness of dawn's first light he made out the rows of trees bordering the road.

Grimacing, he pushed himself up on hands and knees and felt beneath him with one hand until his fingers closed around whatever it was that had been digging into his ribs. He felt a slight tingling sensation at contact with some smoothly rounded surface. With his free hand he pushed himself into a sitting position in the roadway and brought the still unidentified object into range of his eyes.

It was a squat, stemmed, dull-metal cup.

"Hell of a thing to find in the middle of a road," Pendran grunted. He remembered the glittering object his unknown enemy had used in striking him down. "I'll bet this is what I got bopped with. The guy must have dropped it."

He'd better be finding some place to hole up before the sun reached the horizon, he told himself as he raised his eyes from the cup to survey his surroundings. If the Huns were out searching for British fliers shot down in last night's raid, the middle of a road would be no place to hide.

The odd prickling sensation in his fingers brought his attention back to the cup. Almost as though an electrical curr——

In that instant the truth burst like a great light in his mind and he leaped to his feet, weakness and pain forgotten, eyes popping as though they would roll from their sockets.

This was more than a cup! This was *the* cup! What was it old Merlin had said?

"Legend hath it that its touch gives to the fingers a slight tingle."

But—but so easy? It was impossible! Here he had been prepared to go over all France with a fine-tooth comb; yet within the space of a few hours after leaving his plane, someone had thoughtfully come along and handed the cup to the one person in all the present day world who knew what it really was! Talk about your coincidences!

Pendran thrust the Grail into one of the inner pockets of his flying-togs, slapped dust from his clothing, then started briskly along the road into the west. Hell, this simplified everything. All that was left for him to do was make his way to the Channel coast and get word to England that he was waiting to be picked up. The French Underground could arrange that; they'd done it for other fliers—many times.

Meanwhile, he'd have to find some place to dig in until nightfall. The light on the eastern skyline was quite strong by this time; he was sure to be spotted if he stayed in the open much longer.

Not far ahead of him, a few yards back from the edge of the road, loomed a steep, tree-clothed hill. Sight of it gave him an idea: by gaining its peak and climbing one of the trees there, he would be able to obtain an excellent view of the neighboring countryside. Thus he would be able to spot the nearest farmhouse—also any roving bands of soldiers that might be nearby.

Flinging caution to the winds, he bounded up the steep incline. At the peak, he paused for a few moments to gain his breath, then pushed his way

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through the thick undergrowth between the heavy trunks until he reached the base of a particularly tall tree that towered well above its neighbors.

Pendran hesitated for a last look around before clambering into the branches. The faint light made ghostly his surroundings. The subdued twitter of awakening birds seemed to emphasize the brooding stillness. Despite himself, Pendran shivered a bit under the almost eerie atmosphere.

Shaking his head as if to dispel unwelcome thoughts, he reached upward for a low-hanging branch.

And as he did so, a rifle muzzle was jabbed against his spine and a guttural voice growled:

"Do not move, Englishman!"

* * *

HAUPTMANN KARL BROCK, at his desk in the administration building of the German military encampment outside Charleville, looked up as an orderly entered.

"What is it, Louderbeck?" he asked.

The orderly, stiffly at attention, said: "*Gruppenfuehrer* von Lemske has arrived, *Herr* Captain."

Brock left his chair with alacrity and came around to the front of the desk.

"Show him in immediately," he snapped. "An officer of his rank must not be kept waiting."

A moment later the rangy figure of the *Sicherheitsdienst* leader appeared in the doorway and returned the captain's hurried salute.

The two men shook hands, and the captain made a great show of drawing a chair into position near the desk for his distinguished visitor. Von Lemske sat down and leisurely drew off his gloves while *Hauptmann* Brock resumed his chair behind the desk.

"Have you managed to apprehend our quarry as yet, Captain?" the S.D. leader asked, as he accepted a cigarette from the box his host extended.

Brock struck a match and leaned across his desk to hold it to von Lemske's cigarette. "Unfortunately, no, *mein Herr*," he replied regretfully. "He has proved himself to be a resourceful, daring man, and so far has eluded us. But I am confident we shall have him within a day or two."

There was a moment of silence. Von Lemske leaned back in his chair, puffing meditatively at his cigarette, his eyes following a shaft of early morning sunlight that streamed through the first-floor window to illuminate the huge black swastika in the center of the white and red flag against the wall behind Brock's desk.

The captain stirred uneasily. The S.D. officer's silence might be indicative of displeasure at Brock's failure to capture the fugitive assassin. He was casting about in his mind for some remark with which to change the subject, when a discreet knock sounded at the closed door.

"Enter," Brock called, welcoming the interruption; and when the orderly opened the door and stepped in, he said, "What is it, Louderbeck?"

"A detail has returned to camp with a captured British flier, *Herr Hauptmann*."

Brock saw the quick interest in von Lemske's expression. He said, "A diversion, *mein Herr*. It is my duty to question the Englishman. Would you care to assist?"

"By all means!" Von Lemske sat up. "I should be delighted."

Brock nodded to the orderly. "Have him brought here, Louderbeck."

A few minutes later two tall soldiers entered, a red-headed young man in the uniform of a Canadian air officer between them. There were dust stains along the front of his disheveled cloth-

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ing and a bluish welt marred the skin over his left temple close to the hairline.

Brock dismissed the escort with a curt gesture, leaving Flying Officer Arthur Pendran standing in the center of the room. The young American saw a tall, raw-boned German officer in a gray uniform watching him coldly from a chair beside a huge desk; while, seated behind the desk itself, a plump-bodied man in a greenish field uniform with a captain's insignia stared at him coldly.

The captain was the first to speak. "State your name and rank!" he snapped, speaking in accented English.

"Arthur Pendran, Flying Officer, Royal Canadian Air Force."

"You in the raid on Charleville participated?"

Pendran nodded, grinning. "Yeah. Good show, wasn't it, Captain?"

Brock's face burned with sudden anger and he glared at the prisoner. "Confine your remarks to direct answers to my questions. Insolence will not be tolerated!"

Pendran's eyebrows shot up as he gave a comic rendition of astonishment. "How you talk, Captain!" he drawled. "Why, at heart I'm the nicest guy you can imagine!"

WITHOUT a word, the round-faced captain came out of his chair, seized a leather riding-crop from the top of the desk and started toward the lounging figure of the airman. Pendran stiffened and his hands balled into fists as he prepared to defend himself.

"Permit me, Captain Brock."

The words, calm and unhurried, came from the gray-uniformed officer and halted the plump German in his tracks. Von Lemske waved his companion back to the desk chair. Then he took Brock's cigarette box and extended it to the flier.

"Care to smoke, Pendran?" he asked agreeably.

"Thanks." Pendran took one of the proffered tubes and accepted a light. He watched the man in gray toss the box back onto the desk before leaning back once more in his chair.

"*Herr* Pendran, you are an American, *nicht wahr?*" he began conversationally.

Pendran blinked. "How did you know that?"

Von Lemske smiled. "For six years I was attached to the German Embassy in Washington. You Americans are a distinctive people; I admire them very much. Are there many of them flying for England?"

Pendran smiled. "That's probably a military secret, sir."

The S.D. man lost none of his urbanity. "Of course. Being an American you wouldn't tell me if you knew. Well, my friend, you are now a prisoner of war. As a fellow officer, permit me to hope your stay in Germany is a pleasant one. Is there any request you care to make that I might be able to fulfill?"

Arthur Pendran hesitated. The frank, friendly manner of this man seemed at variance with the ruthless, cruel lines of his countenance. He had heard stories of German tactics: how they were adept at worming their way into a man's confidence, using distorted truths to shake his morale, causing him to blurt out the facts they wanted in his efforts to refute their claims.

Yet there was something he wanted —wanted so much that he decided to avail himself of the other's offer.

"Thank you," he said diffidently. "If you could arrange to have a few of my personal belongings returned to me, I shall be grateful. The soldiers who captured me emptied my pockets."

"That is not an unreasonable request," von Lemske agreed. He turned

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his head toward the frozen-faced man behind the desk. "Suppose you have *Herr* Pendran's effects brought in, Captain."

Captain Brock, masking his anger at being superseded in his own office, pressed the button that summoned his orderly, and issued the necessary instructions. A brief wait followed, in which von Lemske asked a few innocuous questions which Pendran answered readily; then Louderbeck returned, hands filled with articles taken from the flier's pockets by his captors.

Von Lemske extended a languid hand and pawed through the small heap the orderly had placed on Brock's desk.

"The gun you won't want," he said, smiling; "the cigarettes, of course, are perm——" He stopped abruptly in mid-sentence, staring with narrowed eyes at a short-stemmed silver goblet which had been partially concealed by Pendran's pocket kit of field rations. He picked it up, hefted it appraisingly and shot a keen glance at the flier.

"Queer object for an airman to carry on a raid," he observed. "What is its purpose, Pendran?"

THE young American kept his face expressionless. So much depended on his being permitted to retain possession of the cup. Surely Merlin would be able to establish contact with him in a German prison camp as easily as in a Chicago apartment building!

"A good-luck piece," he explained casually. "Carry it with me wherever I go. I'd hate to be without it."

"H'mm." Something in the *Gruppenfuehrer's* mind was struggling for recognition. Cup? Cup? It seemed to tie in with something . . . He shrugged and gave up.

"Here you are, Pendran," he said, and tossed the ancient trophy to the young man. "Keep it if you like. You must admit, though, that it hasn't proved much of a luck piece this time . . ."

His voice trailed off and slowly his parted lips came together in a straight, hard line. For within his mind, two separate scenes had taken position to give him one composite picture.

The first was of Fredrich von Lemske standing in front of a glass display case with an empty space on its shelf, while he read the inscription from a white card—words that gave a description of just such a cup as Pendran was holding.

And the second scene was of a naked man lying on a bare floor, his back torn and bleeding from whip lashes . . . a man who, from the depths of physical agony, had babbled the words of a Psalm that had given solace to the suffering for hundreds of years. And then the half-crazed man had repeated one phrase of that Psalm over and over, until a final blow from the whip had driven him to suicide. It seemed to von Lemske, now, that he could almost hear that pain-maddened voice crying: "My cup runneth over. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! 'My—cup—runneth—over!' Aha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The tortured man had been captured in the same building in which a silver cup later had been stolen by a murdering member of the French Underground. *What had become of the mysterious message Paul Albrecht carried?*

With a lithe bound, *Gruppenfuehrer* von Lemske came out of his chair and tore the metal cup from the astounded Pendran's hand. While the others in the room looked on in complete bewilderment, he upended the cup, seized a pointed letter-spindle from Brock's desk, and began to probe the depths of the hollow stem. A second later a slender capsule of silk, no bigger than his little finger, dropped into his hand.

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"So, *mein Herr,*" he exclaimed triumphantly, "the cup is merely a good-luck piece! And to think, I almost let you get away with it!"

"But I — I don't understand how——" Pendran began, completely bewildered.

"Do you take me for a fool?" von Lemske snarled. "You're no ordinary pilot, Pendran; you're an agent of England, sent here to pick up this capsule. Uniform or no uniform, you are a spy . . . and we shoot spies!"

THE dazed light went out of Arthur Pendran's eyes, replaced by anger. "What do you mean—spy? I'm a fighter-plane pilot and I came over France with a bomber group."

Von Lemske smiled nastily. He said: "Everything must have been carefully worked out. Albrecht was hired to bring the capsule to a point in this vicinity, where you were to meet him by plane. Members of the French Underground were to keep in touch with him. When he saw capture was imminent he entered the church, hid the capsule and passed the word on to the French traitors, one of whom later seized the cup in which the packet was concealed and went on to keep Albrecht's rendezvous with you. You might as well tell us, Pendran, where you've hidden that plane."

Wearily, Pendran shook his head. "I tell you, I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about."

"No? Then how did you get this cup?"

"I—I found it." At the open amusement in the other's glance, Pendran continued hurriedly. "I mean it. This is what happened."

Whereupon he related how he had been attacked by some unknown assailant while traversing the night-shrouded roadway, adding his theory that the attacker had dropped the cup after knocking him senseless with it. He pointed out the mark on his temple as a means of substantiating his story.

When he had finished, von Lemske, who had heard him out without interruption, smiled derisively and shook his head.

"One point makes your story worthless, *mein Herr.* Since this shadowy enemy of yours must have valued the cup to have carried it about with him, *why did he leave it?* Certainly, by your own statement, you were in no condition to prevent him from retaining it. You may be sure he would not so lightly abandon something he had risked his life to possess."

Pendran spread his hands. "Not knowing the identity of the man, I can hardly be expected to explain his actions. I have told you all I know."

Captain Brock, listening to the exchange of English words with only fair success in understanding the rapid flow of speech, could no longer contain his curiosity.

"Just what," he said in German, "is this small packet supposed to contain?"

The S.D. man looked down at the bit of oiled silk in the palm of his hand.

"Frankly, Captain Brock, that is something I myself do not know. My orders were to recover it regardless of cost in lives and take it direct to the Fuehrer himself. That will give you some idea of its importance."

He turned his deep-set eyes back to Pendran. "And as for this British spy . . . lock him up in some safe place until tomorrow's dawn. Then take him out and shoot him!"

CHAPTER VII

Mission Resumed

BY SUNSET that day, Arthur Pendran was heartily sick of his cell.

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It was a very small, almost barren room at the end of an L-shaped corridor on the administration building's first floor. It had a heavy wooden door with a narrow slit for a peep-hole, and a single window, strongly barred. There was a lumpy cot and a crummy blanket, a three-legged stool—and nothing else.

He stood again by the window, staring out at the thick growth of trees that came to within a few yards of the building at that point. Since the window was sashless, the warm July air from outside brought him many sounds: the tramp of goose-stepping soldiers at drill, voices shouting in guttural German, the occasional drone of an overhead plane, and—for an ironical contrast—the songs of birds among the branches. Of the sources of the sounds, Pendran saw only the birds; the others came to him from around the building's corners.

His mood was black, his thoughts bitter. To have had the Holy Grail firmly within his hands . . . only to lose it! Not that he was given much choice; around Charleville the Germans were thick as flies around a sugar bowl, and it would have been a miracle indeed if he had been able to keep out of their clutches. But they would have permitted him to keep possession of the cup had not the cadaverous von Lemske discovered that capsule of silk within its stem.

He wondered vaguely how it had gotten there and what it contained. Whatever it was, his life was to be forfeit because the capsule had been on his person.

That they would shoot him on the following morning, Pendran never doubted. To execute a prisoner of war was contrary to international law, or something, but he was satisfied that would make little difference to the Germans. Actually it wasn't until he began to think of the sentence that he realized he was more disturbed by his failure to restore the Grail to Merlin than he was at the imminence of his own death. He wondered fleetingly if he was afraid to die—and was mildly astonished to find that he most assuredly was!

A BRISK step in the corridor outside roused him, and he turned from the window as a key grated in the door, admitting the tall, slender, gray-clad figure of *Gruppenfuehrer* Fredrich von Lemske.

He crossed the cell with crisp, decisive steps and sat down on the stool. "Sit down, Pendran," he said, not unpleasantly, pointing to the bed.

Wordlessly the American flier obeyed, face expressionless, his cold blue eyes warily watching the other's face. Von Lemske stripped the gray gloves from his fingers, removed a silver cigarette case from his breast pocket, opened and extended it.

When both cigarettes were ignited, the Gestapo officer leaned back, a knee between locked hands, and said:

"Actually, Pendran, there is no reason for you to die."

The younger man's lips twitched in a faint smile. "I'm glad you admit it," he said.

"Everything has worked out very well for me," von Lemske continued. "Paul Albrecht is dead and the packet he carried is safely in my keeping. I shall undoubtedly be given a medal and a promotion by the Fuehrer himself."

"Congratulations," Pendran said dryly.

"But that is not enough," von Lemske went on. "Yet to be caught is that member of the French Underground who passed the capsule on to you. In return for his name, description and present whereabouts, Pendran, I will

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rescind your death sentence. What do you say?"

The young flier sighed. "Can't I make you understand that I got hold of that capsule purely by accident? That I don't know who struck me down with that cup? It happened so fast that I didn't even see him."

The S.D. man shook his head sadly. "Your loyalty is misplaced, *mein Herr*. Let us look at this matter logically. You are prepared to sacrifice your life to keep secret the identity of a man who will be in our hands within a few days at most.

"Now, that man has already made one attempt on my life. It is entirely possible that he will make another. Conceivably he may succeed. So, for my own protection, I want him caught without delay. For your aid I promise you your life."

"There is only one drawback," Pendran said. "I don't know who the man is."

Von Lemske stared hard at him for a long moment, then dropped his cigarette to the floor, stepped on it and rose to his feet.

"As you will," he said carelessly. "If you change your mind during the night, the guard outside your door will get word to me."

He crossed to the door, said a few words through the peep-hole, and the soldier outside unlocked the door to let him through. On the threshold, the *Gruppenfuehrer* turned to say:

"When you are ready for your dinner, *mein Herr*, tell the guard what you would like to eat. It will be furnished, if possible. That is in line with an American custom, I believe."

Arthur Pendran waited until the sounds of retreating footsteps had faded; then he rose from the bed and went back to the window.

"The condemned man ate a hearty meal," he mused wryly. "That guy's got a sense of humor fit for a tombstone!"

Until long after darkness had fallen he stood there, staring unseeingly through the barred opening. Finally he shrugged his shoulders, went back to the bed, pulled off his boots and lay down. Seconds later he was asleep.

HE WOKE with a start. So complete was the blackness of his cell that he might as well have left his eyes closed for all the use they were.

He lay motionless, his body tense, ears straining for a repetition of the sound that had wakened him. Very soon it came again; the muffled thud of leather against wood—frantic, spasmodic, uncontrolled. Then followed a stifled grunt, a dull thump . . . and silence.

There had been a small light, Pendran recalled, in the corridor just outside his cell door. But it had been extinguished while he slept. It would be useless, then, to go to the peep-hole in an effort to learn what was taking place in the Stygian blackness of that hall. And so he lay quiet, waiting.

Only because he was straining his ears did he hear the rasping thread of sound that he instantly identified as metal against metal. Somebody was unlocking the cell door!

The aged cot had no springs to creak; and for that fact Arthur Pendran thanked the fates. Soundlessly he sat up and lowered his feet to the floor. His mind raced at high speed, searching his memory of the room for some object he might use as a weapon against the prowler. He recalled the materialization of fabled Excalibur in his moment of peril during the night before; and half-consciously the fingers of his right hand curled to fit the sword's hilt—if it should appear.

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But King Arthur's mighty weapon remained above the mantel of a Chicago apartment; instead Pendran's fingers closed about a leg of the wooden stool von Lemske had occupied earlier that evening.

He heard the door open, followed by the whisper of a shoe against the floor near him. Swiftly he raised the stool high above his head with both hands, ready to bring it crashing down once he could——

"Monsieur!"

The whispered word, barely audible though it was, exploded against Pendran's ear-drums like a pistol shot. He started violently, almost dropping the stool. He was forced to swallow twice before his reply came.

"Who's there?" he murmured.

There was a clearly audible sigh of relief. "You are awake. That is good . . . I am a Frenchman, monsieur. You are the English flier, no?"

Pendran grinned under cover of the blackness and softly set the stool back on the floor. "I am the English flier, yes," he corrected.

"You wish to escape from here?"

"Sure!"

"Then follow close behind me."

By means of the almost nonexistant light from the cell window, Pendran was now able to make out, dimly, the outlines of his visitor's tall figure. Moving with slow stealth, he followed the Frenchman through the open door of the cell into the utter darkness of the corridor beyond.

Whispered words floated over the shoulder of the man in front: "Guard your steps, monsieur, that you do not trip on the body of the German sentry here."

Pendran made no reply. He knew now what had caused the muffled sounds he had heard upon awakening a few moments before.

THE two men turned into the main corridor and moved on silent feet toward the building's main entrance. Very faintly, Pendran could make out the closed doors lining each side of the hall. At a point half way down the corridor, the Frenchman paused in front of one of those doors and cautiously pushed it open far enough to permit entry.

Within the room, the door closed behind them, Pendran realized this was the office of Captain Brock. Because of two large windows, one of them open to the night air, there was sufficient light to make visible the familiar furnishings.

The Frenchman put his lips close to Pendran's ear. "A sentry patrols the grounds between this place and the woods," he explained. "We must wait here until he passes these windows. Once he goes by, it requires exactly thirty-two seconds for him to reach the corner of the building. He turns there and is out of sight for at least a minute. Then is when we must get across that strip of open ground."

Pendran's heart was pounding under the stimulus of danger and excitement. Side by side, the Frenchman and the young American crouched low, Captain Brock's heavy desk between them and the door, while their eyes stayed glued to the windows.

A long minute dragged by . . . two. Suddenly Pendran felt the slender fingers of his rescuer close in warning about his wrist. And then the grotesque shadow of a helmeted head floated past one window . . . and the second. The two waiting men, their bodies tense, every sense alert, could hear the rustle of grass under the methodical thud of heavy boots.

The Frenchman's lips moved soundlessly as he ticked off the passing seconds. Then:

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"Bien! We go now! Quickly. But with the great stealth, monsieur!"

An instant later and they were through the window, racing lightly as disembodied spirits across the narrow stretch of open ground between the building and the wall of trees looming ahead of them. At any second Pendran expected to hear a startled, guttural shout and the stinging report of some alert sentry's rifle; but neither came.

And then the protecting foliage of the forest reached out to envelop the fugitives, and they slowed their pace to little more than that of a snail. Pendran knew without being told that a careless step, a snapped twig, might bring a hornet's nest of German soldiers down upon them.

Not until the fleeing pair had put better than three kilometers between them and the German encampment, did the Frenchman call a halt at the center of a tiny glade.

THEY sank down on a fallen log, there, and for a little while neither spoke. Pendran could see his companion more clearly now, and noticed that he was tall, broad-shouldered and with closely cropped black hair. He appeared to be in his middle thirties, with a rather narrow face, prominent nose and intelligent eyes.

Pendran said lightly: "Well, looks like we gave 'em the slip. Thanks for saving me from a nasty mess, mister."

White teeth flashed in a broad smile. "I am Robert Hermont, monsieur. And you are American, not English, *n'est-ce pas?"*

Pendran grinned; "It must stick out all over me! Even the Heinies knew it. Sure; I'm a Yank. Name's Arthur Pendran, Flight Officer, Royal Canadian Air Force."

Gravely, they shook hands. Hermont said, "With each passing day more of your countrymen come to fight against *le Boche.* That is good. Some day soon, they will come in great waves; then will the Germans prepare for defeat. . . .

"But now I must get you to my friends not far from here. They will start you on the hidden paths that lead to England."

"The Underground, eh?" Pendran asked, interested.

"So the English call it. There will be danger, monsieur; but our organization has been able to send many of our brave allies to England again that they may continue the fight against Germany rather than rot away in some prison camp. You would not have liked their camps, monsieur."

"I wouldn't have had the chance not to like them, Hermont," Pendran said grimly. "They had other plans for me."

The Frenchman was clearly puzzled. "Yes?"

"Not nice plans, either. You see, I was slated to be shot at dawn this morning!"

"Mon Dieu!" Hermont cried, horror-struck. "But you are a fighter—a soldier of the skies! Even the fascists would not dare to shoot honest prisoners!"

Pendran shrugged. "They insisted I was a spy," he said. "It's quite a story, Hermont; would you like to hear it?"

"But of course! We have time, I think."

WHEREUPON, Arthur Pendran related his adventures of the past thirty, or so, hours. Principally because he feared to overtax the credulity of his listener, he omitted all mention of the part Excalibur had played in saving his life; nor did he refer to the

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cup as being the Holy Grail. When he came to the part where a mysterious assailant had struck him down with the silver cup, Hermont muttered something but did not interrupt.

"I think, monsieur," he said, when Pendran had concluded, "that the contents of that silk-encased capsule must reach its intended destination—England. And to think, only a few short hours ago it was in these hands of mine!"

It was the American's turn to show surprise. "Why do you say that, Hermont?"

The Frenchman appeared embarrassed. "I have a confession to make, my friend," he said slowly. "You must forgive me when I explain that it was I who struck you down with that cup."

"You!"

"Precisely. I was following a road through the darkness. My nerves—I do have nerves, monsieur; very tender ones—were tight with concern; for there were many German patrols about, searching for English fliers shot down during the raid on Charleville.

"Suddenly a great, broad figure comes upon me from around a bend of that road. It is a German soldier; if I shoot him, his friends will hear the shot and come running. Even as I am thinking, my hand acts. It goes into my pocket, comes out with the cup and strikes down the German soldier. So hard do I strike that the metal cup is knocked from my fingers and I run rapidly away without stopping to retrieve it. . . .

"And only now do I learn that it was no *Boche* I struck down; it was you! I offer my humble apologies, monsieur."

"Forget it," Pendran said, grinning. "If you had been thoughtless enough to use your gun, instead of the cup, I would not be alive now."

He sobered abruptly as a thought came to him. "I'm afraid I have another surprise for you, Hermont," he said slowly.

"Yes?"

"I shall not be able to meet your friends of the Underground tonight—rather, this morning."

Hermont stiffened with alarm. "But, monsieur, you must! It will be fatal for you to remain at large; the Germans would have you back in their hands within hours."

Arthur Pendran shrugged. "I must chance that," he declared. "There is something back at the German encampment that I must go back for—something very important to the Allied cause."

The Frenchman tossed up his hands in a typically Gallic gesture. "But of course! The mysterious capsule. Did I not say that it must reach its true destination? Already I have made plans to regain possession of it."

"Not that alone," the American said. "There is something else."

"Yes?"

For a long moment Pendran was silent. He realized the time had come for him to take another into his confidence, to explain the true significance of the silver cup. His materialistic mind rebelled at voicing words that probably would brand him a madman. Yet it seemed he had no alternative; for without Hermont's assistance he could hardly hope to get back the Grail.

AND so he told Hermont the entire story, holding back nothing. As he spoke, his listener's expression slowly changed from open wonder to frank incredulity. Pendran went doggedly on to the finish, then settled back and waited for either laughter or contempt. Calmly he met the Frenchman's wide-eyed gaze. Then:

"Mon Dieu!" Hermont breathed.

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"That explains everything. Yours is a sublime mission, Monsieur Pendran; now it is my mission as well."

"You believe my story, then?" Pendran asked simply.

"But of course! Did not the Cup of God twice save my life only two nights ago?"

Pendran's jaw sagged. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I have said," Hermont said impressively. "Two nights ago, my American friend, a group of my countrymen and I fought a battle with a band of Gestapo agents and their leader, the infamous Fredrich von Lemske. The battle took place at a church in the village of Carignan, not far from here. During its course, I was struck by a bullet that passed through my body less than an inch from my heart. I was as good as dead.

"To comfort my last minutes of life, the good priest of the church brought me wine, serving it in a silver cup which he took from a display case. Then we discovered the bullet wound was gone!

"In the heat of battle, the miracle was forgotten. Unconsciously I slipped the cup into one of my pockets. Not long after, my companions and I made a final effort to escape the Hun's trap. Those with me died as heroes; and German fingers were tightening on triggers to kill me. I had braced my body for the shock of death, when suddenly the two remaining Germans threw up their arms and covered their eyes as if blinded by some awful light. I could not understand their actions, monsieur, for I saw nothing to account for such behavior. But I did not wait to investigate, but instead fled into the night."

"In other words," the flier said in an awed voice, "the Grail saved you."

"So it would seem, Monsieur Pendran."

For a little while there was silence in the forest-locked glade. Above them the heavy clouds began to break up and a silvery half moon sent shafts of light to dispel the opaque shadows of the night.

Finally Pendran said, "Now you understand why I must go back there."

The Frenchman thought it over. Then:

"No. We cannot chance it. Even now they may have found the body of the dead guard and discovered that his slayer is wearing his uniform. For us to return now might mean our capture.

"No, we must be cunning, my young friend. We must outwit the very intelligent Fredrich von Lemske. And this is how I think it can be done . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

The Cup and the Sword

KNUCKLES beating a frantic tattoo against the door of his sleeping quarters roused *Gruppenfuehrer* Fredrich von Lemske from the depths of sleep. He tossed back the light blanket and bounded out of bed, appearing, in the faint light of early dawn, even thinner and taller in striped pajamas.

When he unlocked and opened the door, he found Louderbeck, Captain Brock's orderly, standing in the corridor. The orderly's face was white and drawn, and the hand he lifted in salute was trembling.

"*Hauptmann* Brock's compliments, *Herr Gruppenfuehrer,*" he said hoarsely, "and would you come to his office at your earliest convenience?"

"Certainly," von Lemske said affably. "He is preparing to execute the British flier, I suppose?"

"The—the captain did not say, *Herr Gruppenfeuhrer,*" the orderly stammered.

Von Lemske eyed sharply the oth-

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er's trembling hands and pallid features. Something, he told himself, was amiss—badly amiss. "Tell Captain Brock I shall join him the moment I have dressed," he said. . . .

When von Lemske entered the captain's office a few minutes later, he found Brock agitatedly pacing the floor in front of his desk. Two German soldiers were standing stiffly at attention in the center of the room, their ears reddened by the blistering flow of invective the captain had poured upon them.

At the S.D. man's entrance, the plump-bodied officer saluted woodenly and said, "I regret to report, *mein Herr*, that the British airman has escaped."

Von Lemske, his bony face expressionless, stared at the speaker for a moment, then crossed the room and sat down on a straight-backed chair.

"How did this happen, Brock?" he asked quietly.

The captain's round cheeks were mottled with color. He said, "It is not altogether clear. When the guards went to get the American, they found the sentry dead. He had been strangled and his uniform removed. The cell door was open and our prisoner missing."

"It seems unlikely that he could have escaped without help," von Lemske said. He pushed out his long legs and regarded the tips of his polished boots. "There must have been an accomplice."

"My own thought in the matter," Brock said. He jerked his bullet head toward the two soldiers standing at attention. "These dunderheads patroled the grounds about the building last night. They swear no one entered or left the place during that time. Yet this morning I find a window of my own office open and the marks of muddy shoes on the floor."

"You have sent searching parties out to hunt for the American?" von Lemske asked.

"Yes. But the woods about Charleville are thick and cover a great deal of the countryside. It will be difficult, at best."

"I have met a considerable number of officers during my work in the occupied countries, Captain Brock," von Lemske said in mild tones. "But never before have I encountered such a careless, slovenly, stupid excuse for a commissioned officer as you! Actually you deserve to be shot; at least you should be stripped of your rank. I shall certainly see to it that a full report of your incompetence is made to the proper person."

BROCK'S face had slowly turned dirty gray in color as the calm voice went relentlessly on. He said, "As the *Herr Gruppenfuehrer* has already made his decision, it is, of course, useless for me to comment."

"Of course," von Lemske agreed urbanely. He rose languidly to his feet, settled his uniform cap at a rakish angle on his skeleton's head, and helped himself to one of the cigarettes from the captain's humidor.

"Have my car brought around immediately," he said. "I am returning to the village of Carignan to restore a relic that belongs to the church there. Father Dalcroix must be shown that we Germans always get what we go after."

The explanation meant nothing to Captain Brock, nor did von Lemske elaborate. The true reason behind the S.D. man's decision to return the cup to Dalcroix was to trap the priest into damaging admissions by claiming that the Frenchman who had taken it was now a captive and had implicated the church dignitary.

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Brock said stiffly, "Your car will be ready within a few minutes, *mein Herr.*"

"Thank you." Von Lemske turned to leave the room. At the door, he looked back, said: "Don't think I have abandoned hope of capturing the Frenchman whom I came here to find. And a possibility you have stupidly overlooked is that the Frenchman could be the one who freed the American. I shall be back here in a few days, Captain, to take up the search for *both* men."

THE sleek-lined Mercedes-Benz limousine swung away from the entrance of the German Headquarters' building, crossed the clearing and, moving very slowly, entered the rutted roadway that led to the broad, paved highway connecting Charleville and Carignan.

While, from the sheltering fringes of trees lining the clearing, two men—one in the green-hued uniform of a German soldier, the other wearing the flying-togs of the R.C.A.F.—watched with visible satisfaction as the car disappeared from their view.

"We must move with the great speed, Monsieur Pendran," said the man in green. "It is no more than ten kilometers to the main road, while the bridge across the Thon river is less than half that distance. Luckily, von Lemske's car must move at a snail's pace because of the road's poor condition; by a fast trot we should reach the bridge ahead of him with minutes to spare."

Pendran looked doubtful. "What if the car turns off on some side road before reaching the bridge."

"That cannot be," Hermont replied. He thrust out his upturned hand in a graphic gesture. "Like this palm do I know the countryside of this province. And I tell you there is no place between here and the principal road where even a bicycle could turn off, so dense do the trees grow."

"Okay," Pendran said, satisfied. "Then let's get to that bridge—but quick!"

GRUPPENFUEHRER Fredrich von Lemske gripped the swaying handstrap to keep from being thrown from the rear seat of the black sedan.

"*Gross Gott,* Klaus!" he exclaimed from between set teeth. "Must we hit every rut in this *verdammt* ditch?"

Klaus, in the driver's seat, clutched the shuddering wheel with sweating hands, the Death's-head symbol on his cap bobbing with the motion of the car. "Your pardon, Excellency," he panted. "Once we reach the bridge, the way will be smoother."

"Even the pits of Hell would seem smoother!" the officer grunted, and lapsed into gloomy silence.

Half an hour later they rounded a sharp curve to come within sight of a rude stone bridge spanning a steep-sided ravine, at the bottom of which moved the deep, narrow, swift-flowing River Thon. Klaus let go a sigh of relief, increased his pressure on the accelerator to pick up speed . . . and slammed on the brakes!

There was a dull *thud* as von Lemske's knees rammed against the front seat, followed by a crackling string of round German oaths that sizzled about the ears of Klaus and Watenburg like lightning in a cloud-filled sky.

"Are you," thundered von Lemske, when he had exhausted his extensive store of profanity, "deliberately trying to kill——" The words died in his throat as his sharp eyes caught a glimpse of the object in the road a few yards beyond the Mercedes' front wheels.

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It was the motionless body of a man in a German uniform, face-down, crumpled and twisted as though sudden and unexpected death had struck him.

Watenburg, the second of von Lemske's two S.S. guards, reached for the door, but the leader's sharp command stopped him.

"No, you fool, it may be a trap!"

The seconds sped by while the three men sat motionless in the car. Von Lemske's keen eyes bored into the still body lying in the dust. A vagrant breeze stirred the folds of the uniform coat. . . .

"Drive on, Klaus," von Lemske said abruptly.

The man behind the wheel turned a startled face toward the rear seat. "But, Excellency," he protested, "there is not enough room to swing the car around that . . . man."

"Then run over him!" the officer snapped. "If he is dead it will make no difference."

Klaus swallowed, but obediently he put the car in motion. He cut the wheels over until the left side of the sedan scraped the barrier of foliage at the road's edge, but it was clearly evident that the heavy tires must roll over the unmoving figure in the trail. Gradually the distance narrowed; another few feet and the way would be clear again. . . .

"Stop!"

The car lurched to a halt. Von Lemske was standing now, gloved hands gripping the seat in front of him, his eyes intent on the huddled form.

"Look!" he exclaimed in low tones. "The right hand . . . it is moving!"

Slowly, as though obeying the dictates of a half-conscious mind, the dust-smudged fingers contracted, and the hand shifted as though to force the prone figure away from the earth.

Walter Watenburg said, "He is alive, Excellency, and badly hurt. I can see blood in the dirt under his head."

Fredrich von Lemske hesitated no longer. "I am getting to the point where I see personal danger in every incident," he said, his thin lips curling in self-derision. "Open the car door, Watenburg; we must help the poor fellow."

THEY descended from the car—the three of them—and formed a semi-circle about the injured man. Klaus knelt in the dust and reached out with the intention of turning the figure face up. . . .

Behind them, a voice said *"Hände hoch!"* in flawless German.

There followed a brief moment of petrified silence; then, their faces suddenly expressionless masks, the three officers lifted their hands in grudging obedience.

As for the "wounded" man in the green uniform—he bounded lightly to his feet, his narrow, dark-skinned face split with a wide, white-toothed smile.

"Keep your gun pointed at them, Monsieur Pendran," he called, over the heads of the captives, "while I avail myself of their weapons."

"Check," Pendran said laconically.

Whereupon, the broad-shouldered Hermont sidled up to the three Germans and divested them of their guns. He found only three—one from each man—all Lugers. Two went into the pockets of his borrowed coat; the third he trained on the prisoners, after first making sure it was fully loaded.

Arthur Pendran came around to join the Frenchman, gazing with interest at the faces of von Lemske and the two Death's-head troopers. There was deep fear in those last two—evident despite the rigid blankness where expressions should have been.

With the *Gruppenfuehrer,* however,

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it was different. Not that his thinly moulded features held any more emotion than did those of his companions; there was even less, if possible. But behind the façade of those cold blue-gray eyes was a consuming rage—a rage directed not so much at his captors as at himself for having been taken in by so ancient a ruse.

Hermont said crisply, "We have no time to waste, Monsieur von Lemske. Please hand over the small silk-wrapped packet you took from my American friend."

He gave the order in English, so that Pendran might understand. In the same tongue, the S. D. man said:

"I regret to disappoint you, but it is not in my possession."

The Frenchman's voice was bland as he said, "That is a lie, of course. You have attached too much importance to the packet to allow it out of your keeping. Give it to me at once."

It would be to his benefit, von Lemske realized, to keep the conversation going as long as possible. At any moment, a German car or truck might approach on its way to the camp.

Hermont's words interrupted his thoughts. "If necessary, monsieur, I shall shoot you down like the dog you are and take the capsule from your lifeless body!"

A gray tinge crept into the German officer's cheeks, but he said, steadily enough, "Since there is no doubt in my mind that you intend to kill us anyway, your threat does not frighten me, *mein Herr*. But I am wondering if there is not some bargain we can make that will give you what you want and permit my men and me to keep our lives."

"You are wasting time," Hermont said, a thread of anger discernible in his voice. He extended his left hand toward von Lemske. "Hurry, monsieur; we may be interrupted at any moment."

THE *Gruppenfuehrer* knew he could delay no longer. Slowly he lowered one of his upraised hands, slid its fingers into the left breast pocket of his uniform coat and brought out the tiny silk object that already had cost several men their lives.

Hermont took it and, his eyes never leaving the German, handed it to Arthur Pendran. The flier dropped the capsule into one of his pockets, carefully buttoned the flap, then said:

"What about the cup, Hermont?"

"Ah yes—the cup." The Frenchman nodded. "One thing more, Monsieur von Lemske; my young friend desires to regain the good-luck piece you took from him."

Von Lemske blinked. To risk precious time in recovering a valueless bit of metal seemed the height of folly. Americans, he reflected, were certainly a strange lot. Yet the delay would give him a few moments more of life . . .

They did not see the sudden gleam in his eyes as he said, "If it is Father Dalcroix' cup that you want, it is in a small wooden box in the car. Klaus can get it for you."

Hermont stepped back a few feet. "Keep your gun on this man, Monsieur Pendran, while I accompany his two men to the Mercedes to get your property. At the first false move he makes, shoot him!"

Pendran grinned. "It will be a pleasure!"

Hermont directed a few rapid words in German at the two Death's-head men, who turned obediently and walked toward the open doors of the sedan, the Frenchman at their heels.

"Have I your permission to smoke, *Herr* Pendran?" von Lemske said pleasantly.

The young American hesitated, then

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nodded. "Go ahead," he said; "but don't move your hands too quick."

With slow, almost gingerly movements, the gray-uniformed officer dug his heavy silver cigarette case from a pocket, opened it and took out one of the paper tubes, which he placed between his lips. Then, without warning, he threw himself forward, the silver case in his hand held squarely in front of Pendran's gun-muzzle.

Pendran voiced a startled shout, and his forefinger instinctively closed on the trigger. The sharp crack of a gun-shot mingled with the ringing clang of a bullet striking metal; the cigarette case spun from the partially paralyzed fingers of von Lemske's left hand, and the German's right fist crashed with terrible force into the American's face.

Hermont, in the act of taking a small wooden box from Klaus' beefy fingers, heard the cry and the shot. With a lithe bound he sprang away from the two black-clad Nazis, the box under one arm, his gun still trained on Klaus and Watenburg.

The events that followed in that brief section of a French roadway were such as no mortal eyes had ever before witnessed since the beginning of time.

Von Lemske bent swiftly and snatched the gun from Pendran's dazed fingers. Instantly he straightened, his face alight with blazing triumph, and leveled the barrel at the fallen flier's head.

And as the German's finger closed on the trigger, as Pendran lifted futile hands to ward off certain death, something glittered into existance between the two men—something that was a something no longer, but had become a long, gleaming bejeweled sword of shining steel!

THE astounded *Gruppenfuehrer* recoiled in stupefied alarm as fabled Excalibur rose to confront him, its hilt firmly incased in the fallen man's grasp. And then the mighty blade flashed forward in a glittering arc squarely at von Lemske's head!

Notwithstanding the shock given his nerves by the sword's incredible materialization, the officer lost none of his courage. As the keen edge descended, he stepped agilely to one side and sought to parry the blow with the barrel of his gun. Like flame through tissue, Excalibur sliced through the Luger's barrel; but von Lemske, with a deft motion, caught Pendran's wrist and twisted it savagely, wrenching the sword from his hand.

Once again the tables were turned. Nor did the German hesitate to make use of his advantage. Wrapping both hands about the broad hilt, he swung the great blade up and back, preparatory to bringing it down on his prostrate foe.

Hermont, his gun still holding Klaus and Watenburg at bay, felt a groan of helpless horror form in his throat. To risk a shot at von Lemske would be all the S. S. men needed. Yet he must act immediately, or Pendran was doomed.

And in that instant there popped into his mind the memory of a church scene in which a tall, broad-shouldered Frenchman stood facing two guns in the hands of his enemies, waiting with fatalistic calm for those guns to speak.

. . .

The small wooden box, not more than six by eight inches in size, slipped into the palm of his left hand.

"Pendran!" he shouted, loud and clear, and with a short underhand flipping motion, tossed the box at the head of his fallen friend.

Excalibur was already streaking downward as Arthur Pendran automatically brought up his hands to prevent the wooden container from strik-

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ing him in the face. As his fingers closed about the box, the falling sword, wielded with the full strength of von Lemske's muscular arms, stopped in mid-swing as though it had encountered a wall of stone!

The man on the ground saw an expression of uncomprehending astonishment flood into the face above him—an expression that suddenly changed into such utter and devastating horror that it sent an icy chill through him. head, the rigid muscles under the gray coat . . . and he understood.

The sword was lifting to strike the man who held it!

Slowly, relentlessly, the weapon of a long-dead king swung toward the exposed neck of the now fear-crazed officer. Pendran could see the quivering fingers seek to loose themselves from the finely wrought hilt, but all in vain.

Abruptly that terror-stricken resistance collapsed, the blade slashed about

Pendran, helpless on the ground, watched the scene with awed fascination

At first Pendran thought the German was lifting the sword to strike at him a second time; but he caught a glimpse of the straining cords in his neck, the perspiration standing out on his fore- with the speed of light, flesh closed around the keen edge, and a fountain of blood gushed into the sunlight.

Thus perished Fredrich von Lemske, stricken unto death by a Power be-

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The officer recoiled in horror as the steel blade bit deep into his flesh

yond the comprehension of man.

IT WAS Wolfgang Klaus who recovered first. As the *Gruppenfuehrer's* lifeless body toppled into the dusty road, he flung himself at the bemused figure of Robert Hermont before the Frenchman could shake off the spell of the incredible miracle he had just witnessed.

The Luger roared and red blossomed high up on Klaus' shoulder. But too

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late; the S.S. guard's body struck Hermont squarely and knocked him sprawling, sending the gun spinning from his hand.

The red-haired American, rising to his feet at that moment, saw Watenburg leap cat-like toward the gun and scoop it up. As Hermont scrambled hastily to his feet, the Death's-head trooper was training the Luger at his head.

Uttering a wild yell, Pendran drew back his arm and flung the wooden box containing the Grail straight at Watenburg's crouching form. But the throw had been too hurried; the box passed a full six inches above Watenburg's head and disappeared over the edge of the deep ravine.

An instant later, the gun spoke as the black-garbed German calmly pumped a bullet into Robert Hermont's forehead!

It was then that Arthur Pendran, Flying Officer, Royal Canadian Air Force, went stark, raving mad. With an inhuman scream of bloodlusting rage, he tore the great sword from von Lemske's flesh and waving it wildly above his fiery head, bore down upon the two Germans like an avenging spirit.

Watenburg sought to bring his gun to bear upon the crazed American, but the flailing length of steel caught him as he turned, splitting his head from crown to neck. Wolfgang Klaus, wounded though he was, flung himself at the American, only to die as Excalibur ripped into his heart.

As abruptly as it had come, the madness went out of Arthur Pendran. For a little while he stood there, leaning on his sword, his eyes traveling slowly about the scene of awful carnage, feeling sickened by the welter of blood and corpses.

Finally, on reluctant feet, he went to the edge of the ravine and peered unhappily down its precipitous sides. It was at this point that the box containing the Holy Grail had disappeared. There was nothing to be seen other than bare walls of rock and, far below, the silvery reflection of the narrow, swift-flowing River Thon.

He was suddenly aware that his right hand was empty and he looked down to where it hung at his side. Excalibur, mammoth sword of a mighty monarch, was gone—returned, perhaps, to its place above a Chicago mantel.

He unbuttoned the flap of one of his pockets and took out the tiny silk-wrapped capsule. Everything except this was gone: Excalibur and Hermont and the Grail.

The Grail. The Cup that God's only Son had quaffed before going forth to die that mankind might live. The Cup that, were it possessed by the forces of Good in the world, would bring total defeat to the forces of Evil. And now it was gone forever, lost in the depths of a foaming river, thrown there in a futile effort to save the life of a brave man.

He looked again, without curiosity, at the capsule in his hand. Perhaps its contents would prove of some value to England's leaders—if he could get it to them.

He sighed deeply, placed the capsule back in his pocket, then turned and without a backward glance set off on foot into the west, his goal the English Channel some three hundred kilometers —perhaps two hundred miles—away.

CHAPTER IX

Mission's End

A FEW kilometers north of the French coastal town of Cayeux, in the province of Somme, is a tiny, white-cliffed bay which forms the mouth of

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the River Somme.

On a sun-drenched morning in August, 1941, two French boys, Raoul Frecoult and Henri Bernay, lay among the long grasses on the heights overlooking the point where the Somme's waters flowed into the bay.

In a section that bristled with German land and air defenses, where mortared pill-boxes and heavy gun emplacements mingled with air-fields and mine-fields and acres of barbed wire entanglements, the spot where the boys were lying seemed singularly free of the grim garb of modern warfare. Small birds poured out their songs, while overhead the gulls wheeled and dipped in graceful flight.

A hundred feet below the lip of the cliff where the two boys lay, stood a sprawling, ramshackle structure of weather-beaten planks. Painted in fading letters across one side of the building were the words: AMBERT ET CIE —FISH CANNERS.

Raoul, a dark-haired boy of fourteen with a thin white face and large brown eyes, suddenly seized the tattered sleeve of his companion's coat and pointed a finger at the river bank below.

"See, Henri," he said, "there is the old fool now."

The stooped figure of a white-haired old man had appeared in a doorway of the cannery, standing there as though to soak up warmth from the summer sun. A shabby suit of black cloth covered the frail body and a clay pipe hung slackly between his lips.

Henri Bernay said: "My mother often says she feels sorry for poor Monsieur Ambert. The war has been very cruel to him, she says."

"It has hurt all the people of France," Raoul retorted, his brown eyes flashing hotly.

"I know," Henri said. He was a slender, small-boned youngster, a year younger than Raoul Frecoult, with silky blond hair and sensitive features. "But it does not seem right to call him a fool."

"He *is* a fool. Does he not go about picking up every useless thing he can carry? I have seen him walk along the streets of Cayeux, filling his pockets with bits of glass and string—even pieces of stone. He takes those useless things somewhere and hides them away, like a squirrel hiding nuts."

"He does that," Henri explanied, "only because he is so very poor. Before the war, mother says, he was very rich. But the invaders came and took everything from him. His son Armand died while fighting at Dunkirk, and his wife lived only a few days after she learned of his death. The canning business is gone because he can get only a very little tin and no parts at all for the machinery. My mother told me about it."

"I do not think the Germans took everything from him," Raoul said darkly. "He acts very friendly with them at times. Even part of the fish he catches and cans goes to the German soldiers. I heard the men talking once in my father's store. They said it was certain that old Ambert did not lose all his money to the fascists; that he must have put it away where no one could find it—maybe in the same place he puts all the glass and string and stones he picks up!"

THE two boys were silent for a while, watching the bent figure of the old man as he picked his way along the river bank below them. From time to time he stooped and took up some small object which went immediately into one of his pockets.

Finally Raoul Frecoult stirred impatiently. "I am tired of staring at the old fool," he grumbled. "Let us go on."

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He started to rise; but Henri's hand shot out to pull him down again. "Look!" he exclaimed.

From a copse of trees below them at the water's edge, the figure of a young man in a tattered blue uniform came into the open. His head was bare and a matted growth of flaming red hair was clearly visible. He walked very slowly, staggering often as though from weakness.

Raoul, whose eyes were sharper than his friend's, was trembling with excitement. "It is an English flier!" he gasped. "I know that by his uniform. The German pigs must have shot down his plane."

"Monsieur Ambert has seen him," Henri said. "Perhaps he will help the Englishman."

They saw the old man standing very still, watching the young flier weave drunkenly along the bank toward him. Ambert, after looking quickly about as though to make sure there were no witnesses, hurried to the newcomer and passed an arm about his shoulders to steady the other's wavering steps.

"See!" Henri exclaimed triumphantly. "Monsieur Ambert is a good man. He is helping the enemy of the Huns."

Raoul Frecoult did not reply until the two men below had disappeared through one of the cannery's doorways. Then he said in a determined voice, "Let us go quickly back to Cayeux. I must tell my father what we have seen."

"Why must you tell him?" Henri said, puzzled.

"Because I do not trust that old simpleton! He might turn the Englishman over to the Germans. Hurry, Henri, we have no time to waste!"

ARTHUR PENDRAN came slowly from the depths of sleep. For a time he lay unmoving, conscious only of the fact that it was a truly wonderful feeling just to lie in a horizonal position on something besides damp earth.

For three long weeks he had inched his way across German-occupied France, following with grim, unflagging purpose the River Thon until it joined the Somme, then moving doggedly along the banks of the latter toward its mouth.

For the thought had come to him, following the battle in which Robert Hermont and Fredrich von Lemske had been slain, that the box containing the Holy Grail might not have sunk into the Thon's depths, but have floated downstream instead. It was a wild, practically impossible hope, but better than no hope at all; and so he had remained close to the banks of both streams during the course of his journey across northern France.

The number of times he narrowly avoided capture by enemy patrols or sentries was beyond computation; and the fact that he traveled only during the day, lest he miss sight of the box, only added to the possibility of his capture. Several times he had opportunities to change into less conspicuous clothing, but the fear of being shot as a spy were he found in anything other than his own blue uniform kept him from doing so.

Well, all that was behind him now. The Holy Grail was lost and he might as well accept the fact with the best grace he could muster. Now he must concentrate on getting back to England with the silk-encased capsule Hermont had taken from the S. D. man. The strange old man who had taken him into the tumble-down canning factory and fed him and given him a cot, had said something about getting him safely across the Channel. Exactly *what* had been said was not altogether clear; he had been so completely exhausted that words were only instruments of tor-

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ture to keep him awake.

A wavering light against his closed eye-lids interrupted his thoughts; and he opened them to find the bent figure of François Ambert, a lighted candle in his hand, standing beside the cot.

"Good evening, monsieur," he said, speaking in heavily accented English. "I came in to awaken you."

"Evening, hunh?" Pendran swung his feet to the floor and sat up, running his fingers across the heavy growth of red bristles covering his cheeks. "So I've slept the whole day through? Well, I guess I needed it."

Ambert stuck the candle into a tin holder on a nearby table. The wavering flame picked out row upon row of neatly stacked, unlabeled cans on shelves lining the tiny room.

"You have been sleeping for two days and a night, monsieur," he said, exposing yellowed teeth in a wide grin. "Almost I thought you were dead. Only your snores reassured me!

"But meanwhile I have not been idle. Arrangements have been completed; you are to leave for England at once!"

Pendran stared at the old man in round-eyed astonishment. "Just—like—that!" he gasped. "Is it so easy to get out from under the Germans' noses?"

"Oh, it will be difficult enough," Ambert said. "You are to make the voyage alone; and since your craft is to be only a light dory, you must pray that the weather remains clear."

"You mean I've got to row my way across?" Pendran demanded, aghast.

The old man's smile broadened. "No, monsieur. It is a power boat, furnished by the local leader of the French Underground — one Monsieur Frecoult, of Cayeux. However, you must use oars until well away from the coast, else the Germans may hear the motor.

"Put on your clothing now, my English friend; I will await you outside."

WHEN the old man had left, Pendran quickly slipped into his uniform. He was suddenly conscious of being very hungry, but, realizing he had no time to search about for food, contented himself by slipping several of the large, neatly sealed cans of fish into the voluminous pockets of his flying jacket. Then he left the building.

Half an hour later, under cover of a moonless night, Arthur Pendran bade goodby to his elderly friend, stepped into a small boat and took up the oars. Under the powerful swing of his shoulders, the light craft slipped noiselessly across the bay and into the choppy waters of the English Channel.

The first rays of dawn found him alone on a vast plain of water. France lay below the horizon's edge behind him; ahead, still invisible, was Britain's coast. Satisfied that there was no other boat in the vicinity, Pendran started the motor and sank back to let it do the work.

He found a waterproof bag of food under the seat; also a jug of luke-warm water. There were even half a dozen vile-tasting French cigarettes in a bit of paper packed in with the food, which gave the final, perfect touch to his meal.

The day passed without incident. During the passing hours the sun shone brilliantly, a faint cool breeze blew softly out of the east, and the water remained almost perfectly calm.

With less than an hour remaining before sunset, Pendran caught sight of a grayish, cloud-like formation spreading across the western horizon—a shape that grew steadily higher against the sky.

"Just my lousy luck," he muttered, "to run into a storm. And after everything's been going so smooth. I sup-

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pose I'd better——"

Abruptly he broke off in mid-sentence, stared hard at the horizon, then suddenly bounded to his feet with a wild scream of delirious exultation.

"It's England!" he yelled to the heavens. "Old Fish-and-chips herself! Roll out the plush carpet, you limeys; li'l Arthur's coming home!"

Only silence answered him; and he sank back, a trifle ashamed of his outburst. And at that moment, the motor coughed twice—and died!

A hasty examination told him the gasoline tank was empty. With a song on his lips, he picked up the oars and set resolutely to work.

Two hours later the prow of the tiny boat grated against a low, tree-clothed shore. It was quite dark by now and nowhere could he catch the slightest glimmer of artificial light.

"So this is how England guards her shores!" he murmured, as he hopped from the boat and drew it up on the narrow expanse of beach. "I could be the whole German army and no one would know I was around!"

He took several steps toward the line of trees beyond the beach. And then there was a swift rush of feet behind him; he whirled—and went down under the combined impact of a dozen muscular bodies.

"Hey! Take it easy, for the love—" was all he had time to cry out; then something dealt him a terrific blow aside the head, stars exploded before his eyes—and he lost consciousness.

"THE bloke's comin' 'round, 'e is," a nasal voice said.

Pendran opened his eyes, wincing as a sharp twinge shot through his skull, and looked up at the circle of weather-beaten, masculine faces about him, shadowy in the faint light of a lantern hanging on the plank wall next to him.

He said, "You guys sure don't believe in asking questions first, do you?"

There were five of them. One, a round-faced, ruddy-cheeked man in his sixties, said, "We was a mite hasty, sir. But it was that dark we couldn't see yer un-e-form. An' fer all we cud be aknowin', you cud abin a blarsted sob-e-tyoor. What with a special boat, an' all."

From behind the circle of faces, an authoritative voice said crisply, "All right, you men; I'd like to speak to our guest alone, if you don't mind."

The five faces reluctantly disappeared, and Pendran could hear their owners leaving the room. A new face took shape above Pendran's cot—a handsome British face, with a slight blond moustache and a pair of very blue eyes above a natty uniform of an R.A.F. colonel.

"I'm Colonel Manwaring," said the face in the clipped, precise speech of an upper-class Englishman. "We've a base near here, and the men who snaffed you sent for me when they identified your uniform. You've been unconscious for nearly three hours, you know."

"I didn't know," Pendran admitted ruefully. He touched the back of his head gingerly, then added, "But I can sure believe it."

Colonel Manwaring pulled a three-legged stool close to the cot, sat down and drew pencil and small notebook from an inner pocket. "First," he said, "I should like your name, rank and outfit. Then I'd like you to tell me your story. You see, we found a small silk wrapper in one of your pockets; and I should like very much to know how you came by it."

Pendran gave the requested information about himself, then added, "If you don't mind, sir, could you tell me what was in that bit of silk? There were several times I came darned near tak-

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ing a look, but I figured it might be better to turn it over to Military Intelligence unopened."

"There's no reason why I shouldn't ease your curiosity, I suppose," the colonel said. He lowered his voice. "It mustn't be repeated, of course, but the packet contained, on microfilm, complete details of an attempted invasion of Britain the Jerries expect to launch in less than a fortnight.* There is absolutely no doubt of its authenticity."

AFTER Pendran had recounted his adventures of the preceding three weeks, Colonel Manwaring tucked the pencil and notebook into his pocket and got to his feet.

"Your story matches some of the things we already know," he observed. "One of our agents on the Continent got word to us a week ago that Fredrich von Lemske and two of his aides had met their deaths under mysterious circumstances. Certainly he deserved it, from what I hear. . . .

"Well, I must be buzzing off, Pendran. There'll be a car around in the morning to take you back to your base. Meanwhile, Hawkins, who owns this shack, will dig up a spot of food for you and make you comfortable for the night. Not quite Buckingham Palace, I'll admit, but better than the Channel."

"It's downright luxury after what I've been through!" Pendran said, grinning. "Goodnight, Colonel Manwaring —and many thanks."

Shortly after the R.A.F. officer had gone, the door opened again and a stocky-bodied little man with white, thinning hair and a wrinkled, good-humored face came in. He said, "I'm 'Awkins, sir. The colonel said as 'ow you might be wantin' to eat somethin'."

"Thanks, Hawkins; I could use it." Pendran sat up carefully and put his feet on the floor. Beyond a dull ache above his right temple and a feeling of dizziness that passed quickly, he felt pretty much himself. While Hawkins tossed hunks of wood into a small, rusty cooking range, the red-haired flier went over to the chair where his coat lay, and dug from the pockets the four cans he had taken from François Ambert's shelves at the fish cannery. These he stacked neatly on a shelf near the stove, saying:

"Here's something to add to your larder, Hawkins. Fish, I think. Picked them up in France."

The Englishman put the lid back on the stove, wiped his hands, and reached for a can-opener. "H'anything extra these d'ys sure's welcome," he observed. "We'll try some of the Frenchy's fish, that we will."

Pendran retreated to a chair and a cigarette while Hawkins put a pot on the blazing stove and started the opener in one of the cans the American had brought. A moment later there was a startled grunt.

"Something wrong, Hawkins?" Pendran asked idly, glancing up.

The white-haired man turned, grinning, the open can in his hand. "I'm afraid, sir," he said, "that someun's bin pullin' yer leg a bit! Look at this."

The lid of the tin container was removed. *The can was filled with bits of broken glass!*

"Hell's bells!" Pendran gasped incredulously. "Now, why in the world would the Frenchman do a thing like that?"

Two French boys, Raoul Frecoult and Henri Bernay, could have told him of the bent-backed madman who hid

* In August, 1941, Germany attempted to gather an armada of small craft off the French coast, preparatory to launching an invasion of the British Isles. This effort was checkmated by Great Britain with the use of burning oil, which was sprayed over the water. Thousands of German soldiers perished and the maneuver was abandoned.—Ed.

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away, in some unknown place, the odds and ends of worthless junk he accumulated. Hawkins echoed young Frecoult's question by saying, in response to Pendran's question, "Must be a bit on the balmy side, hi'd say. Lots of them Frenchies is. . . . Well, never fear, sir; there's plenty to eat that's our own."

LATER, over a side of mutton and a a few boiled potatoes, Hawkins gave his guest a complete and highly colorful picture of world events during Pendran's weeks on the Continent. And it was near to morning's light when Hawkins finished clearing away the dishes and went off to another room of the shack to sleep, leaving Pendran a few hours in which to rest before the car would come to take the young American back to his base.

For a little while he sat on the edge of his cot, his thoughts jumbled from weariness and the end of the awful strain of the past few weeks. He wondered if old Merlin would call him back through Time to explain his failure to gain possession of the Holy Grail. And the fair Guinevere—what would her reaction be when she learned that the Cup was forever lost, swept to oblivion by swift-flowing waters?

He sighed deeply, there in the darkness. Would Merlin's prophecy be fulfilled: "For this I tell you—naught will prevail against the forces of Evil else ye . . . act!"

It was completely unfair to place the fate of all freedom-loving mankind on so fragile a support as the possession of a bit of metal called the Holy Grail! Yet, even as he rebelled against the idea, he knew that Merlin's prophecy would come true.

At last he could think no longer. And so he stretched himself wearily upon the cot and closed his eyes. And in that instant he fell fast asleep . . . and dreamed.

It seemed to Arthur Pendran that the rough wooden walls of the room were suddenly transparent, and that beyond those walls was the great hall wherein stood the throne-like chair of fabled Queen Guinevere. Clearly he could see unimportant details: the ornately carved chairs grouped about a mammoth fireplace; the crude, unfinished stone of walls and floor; the burly men-at-arms in their coats of mail.

And as he watched, Guinevere, as blonde and as lovely as he last remembered her, appeared in a doorway of that huge hall at the head of a retinue of attendants. Regally she came forward to mount the low dais and seat herself in the throne-chair.

Now came Merlin, his long black gown brushing the floor, his beard gleaming like freshly fallen snow in the strange radiance of the dream. Through the transparent wooden walls he came, to stand, briefly, beside the pallet of the sleeping American. The expression on his calm, ageless face was one of mingled benediction and happiness, of utter and serene satisfaction.

Finally Merlin turned away from the bed and went slowly to the wooden wall across from where Arthur Pendran lay dreaming. And when he turned back again, to face the cot, the young man saw that he held some brightly gleaming object in his hand—an object that Pendran could not identify. And as Merlin held it in his ancient hand, great tears of molten metal seemed to fall in shining drops to the bare wooden floor.

Gradually a shimmering radiance came alive within the circle of Merlin's fingers, until there was revealed a stemmed, goblet-like cup of silver. Larger, ever larger, swelled the periph-

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ery of that pulsating radiance until all else was blotted out.

Then, from the heart of that glowing world of light, came solemn words:

"Well done, Sir Arthur; take pride in thy success!"

ARTHUR PENDRAN awoke with a violent start to find his body bathed in perspiration, his legs and arms trembling as though he had run a great distance. Quickly he rose from the cot and with trembling fingers lighted the lantern that hung from a nail in the wall.

"What a dream!" he muttered in a shaking voice. "Or—was it a dream?"

His eyes swung to where, in the dream, Merlin had stood. *There on the floor, glistening in the yellow lamplight, lay tiny pools of melted tin!*

Even as he raised his eyes to the shelf against the wall, he knew what they would behold. Three tin containers, taken from a run-down French cannery, had stood side by side on that shelf when he had gone to sleep. Two were still in place, but between them, where the third had been, was . . . *nothing.*

Slowly he sank down on the cot's edge and bowed his head in his hands. And gradually there stole over him a warm and abiding peace.

The End.

☆ FEATHERED FREAKS ☆

WHEN Spanish explorers first set foot on the Western Hemisphere they landed on the shores of Central and South America. In the dark mysterious jungles of what we now know as Venezuela and British Guiana they encountered strange four-footed birds, remnants of the earliest ages of the Earth. What thoughts raced through the minds of these daring Spaniards we will never know, but the creatures they saw still inhabit the warm tropical dampness of the lowlands and have been viewed by scientists of our own day.

The four-footed Hoatzin is perhaps the most unusual of all the birds that men of science have studied. All our feathered friends, as you may know, are descended from reptiles. Bone formations which have been preserved for millions of years in solid rock show every stage of the bird's development from his reptile ancestors. All living birds have lost the teeth of the reptile, and all lost the long fleshy tail ages ago; but the Hoatzin, alone of all birds, still retains the front legs with their fingers and claws, although they change to true wings as the birds grow up. For this reason these strange birds are of great interest to scientists.

Aside from the fact that they have four feet when young, the Hoatzin reminds all who view its habits of the characteristic habits of the lizard. When a Hoatzin is in danger, he doesn't try to escape by flying away, but drops to the water and vanishes, exactly as a lizard would do. Like tree lizards, these birds will sidle along the branches or hop from one tree to another when alarmed, and if they finally take flight they will fly only a short distance, using their wings with a great effort. Even the voice of the Hoatzin is more of what one might expect from a reptile than from a bird, for their notes are odd grunts, croaks and squeaks.

On their tramp through the mud and brush entanglements, the Spaniards were the first men from the European Continent to be astounded by the color and number of handsome red-headed blackbirds, golden starlings, sky-blue, crimson, green and yellow tanagers. They must have stared in amazement when they saw the Jacanas run swiftly about on the surface of the water. If they had watched the bird's movements closely they would have found that their eyes had not told the true story. Instead of walking on the water itself, the Jacana uses the leaves of water plants in the same manner that a man uses snowshoes. The bird is built with long slender toes which he is able to spread across several leaves at a time.

The Spaniards endured many hardships on their trek through the jungles of this new strange land. Their armor was heavy and uncomfortable; the mosquito was an annoying as well as dangerous pest. Those that survived the strenuous journey had amazing tales to tell their countrymen after they returned to their homeland, tales of a rich land filled with weird, almost unbelievable creatures.

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The Man Who Lost His Shadow

Laury should have known it was a bad omen when his own shadow left him

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"Those vapors," Hector explained, "put me in the proper mood for reading!"

By THORNE LEE

ILLUSTRATED BY JULIAN KRUPA

THEY say there are no signposts on the street that leads to the end of the world. There was one sign for Laury Grenfall, but he didn't recognize its meaning.

One moment Laury was walking casually along staring at his feet; the dying sun cast a long, ungainly shadow ahead of him. The next moment his feet were frozen tightly, heel to heel, for his shadow had suddenly boiled down to a black pool.

Miraculously, the round black blotch detached itself and darted, spider-like, through the hedge and across the nearest lawn to climb swiftly up a wall of

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brown vines. There was an instant that the thing perched on an upper window-sill, for all the world like a little black gnome rocking on its heels.

Laury rubbed his eyes. "Twilight playing tricks," he muttered uneasily. "Serves me right for staring too long at shadows!"

He swung around with a hollow laugh. Colfax Campus was no longer a reassuring sight. Solemn oaks stood shabby guard before angular, vine-shrouded buildings. A few windows gleamed like aged, watery eyes socketed deeply in unhealthy, mouldering flesh. Five minutes ago it had looked beautiful.

Laury was ashamed of the cold shudder that swept through his body. He straightened his spine, jacking-up the narrow shoulders, and faced about again. He had to force his eyes to read the street-number; somehow he didn't want this to be *the* house.

113. There was no denying the gleaming silver numbers. This gaunt two-story frame, towering monstrously over its neighbors, hedged tightly with brooding evergreens, was Mrs. Wolfe's boarding house!

SLOWLY Laury turned in at the wide walk; tufts of brown grass spilled through crooked seams, forming silent pads to his feet. A smile twitched across the tight line of his lips. "Grow up, son! It isn't the nicest, but you'll have to like it!"

He crossed the porch. His long, slender fingers touched the rusty knocker, hesitated, and then coiled into a ball which tapped meekly at the heavy, iron-studded door. No answer. He pounded harder and a window somewhere rattled like dry bones.

The door finally drifted open. The white feminine face that peered out was neither old nor ominous. Laury grinned sheepishly and removed his hat.

The door creaked wide. "You must be Hector's new roommate," the girl said.

"That's right," Laury replied. "Hector Baum is the name, I believe? It was all arranged at the Dean's office."

"I'm Nina Wolfe. This is my mother's house."

Loose brown hair fell down across both cheeks to form a kind of hood over the girl's face. Little humorous wrinkles flared like sparks around her gray eyes.

"I'm Laurens Grenfall."

"Please come in."

Inside, the beams sagged with age and a faint musty odor clung to the walls. The doorways were hung with grotesque webs of burnished wood. Laury followed the girl up squeaking stairs padded with worn red carpet.

"It's like a home all in one room, Mr. Grenfall," Nina Wolfe promised.

LAURY liked the room at first. He liked the thickly-padded twin beds, the neat mahogany bureaus, the deep closets, the old mahogany roll desk, and the long shelves of ragged books.

He was not so sure about the fellow who stood there scowling over one of the books. Again, oddly, Laury felt that unpleasant twinge in the region of his breast trembling along the ribs to the spine, as though a voice of disaster cried out from his own bones. Bah! What could possibly be alarming about a man reading a book?

Hector Baum was tall and raw-boned, and almost handsome, except that the brows were too heavy and the eyes too sharp. "Laurens Grenfall?" he said, working the name with long lips which curled down at the edges. He tossed Laury's bags into a closet. "You'll do, Grenfall. Not too big. Easy for me to shove around."

Laury shifted his small feet uneasily.

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"I'm post-graduate in education," he offered. "What're you in for?"

Hector Baum grinned. "Criminology. Good old criminology! I want to learn why people stab each other in the back."

"Don't believe him, Mr. Grenfall," Nina Wolfe inserted. "Hector's really interested in *how* people kill each other, not *why!*"

"Oh sure, I play around with the mechanics of murder, but that's just a means to an end."

"Yes?" Laury said politely.

Hector Baum shrugged. "The motive-force is the element I seek. If murder could be tapped at its roots in the rotten substance of the human mind, if we could follow the killer's progress, thought by thought, step by step—"

"He goes on like that for hours!" Nina Wolfe said.

"Excuse my chatter," Hector grunted. "That's my thumbnail biography. What's yours, Grenfall?"

"I'm an orphan—"

"Oh! Too bad."

"No. Not really. I was quite young—brought up in an orphanage, and I intend to carry on in that work."

"Well, well. The humanitarian type, eh?"

"If you boys will excuse me—"

Laury bowed at Nina Wolfe's figure prancing out the door—a trim body, supple at the hips.

"Don't get any ideas," Hector Baum suggested. "Nina just works here. Her mother has puritanic theories about mixing sexes in a boarding house; so daughter lives at a sorority." He drew in his breath through sharp white teeth. "Anyway, I think Nina is the girl I'm going to marry."

CHAPTER II

LAURY learned soon enough about his roommate's habits, particularly his interest in crime, which was something more than academic. Hector seemed to have an uncanny taste for mystery stories; the bookshelves were lined with gruesome titles.

The original neatness of the room had only been a sham, Laury discovered. Ordinarily the roll desk was a litter of bottles, crucibles, fingerprint ink—anything remotely connected with the science of crime. More than once the brown blotting pads were stained with something which clotted too thickly to be red ink. If Laury so much as removed a loose hair or a shred of cloth from that desk he was all but booted down the stairs.

The desk was Hector's "laboratory." Laury's work must be done on any other clear space—usually one of the beds. "You'll get used to it," Hector suggested.

Hector's favorite practice was to take a scientific crime story and work out the detective's experiments in his own laboratory. "Believe it or not, some of the greatest detective work in the world is in novels," Hector explained one evening. "Some of the greatest crimes, too."

"How could a crime be 'great'?" Laury inquired.

Hector grinned. "'Beautiful' is the word," he said. "I could tell you about some beautiful crimes!"

Hector jerked a book from the desk-top, and thrust it into Laury's hands. It was thin but ponderously bound in thick black leather. "I collect rare books of crime detection and mystery. This set of six is a prize. Priceless!"

Laury noticed the title, *The Dripping Heart*. The author's name was surprising, a single name: *Kancir*.

Laury handed back the book distastefully. "That's a queer name—Kancir," he said. "Sounds like a disease."

"Maybe it is!" Hector laughed, paw-

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ing at the gold-edged pages. "Haven't had time to read any of this set, yet. Very rare stuff. I picked these up at an auction from some dead millionaire's library. Nobody guessed how valuable they were. This fellow Kancir was an English-educated Gypsy, a mystic. Wrote only a few books, as far as I can learn. In fact, there's practically nothing about him in literary histories, no reference at all to his dates. What a scoop if I found out that his work preceded Edgar Allan Poe!"

Hector fanned the pages before Laury's eyes. "Note the type: Gothic style. Devilish stuff to read. 'The Black Letter,' they call it. Sounds ominous, doesn't it?"

"Say, that's interesting!" Laury admitted.

"Like to read one, Laury?" For the first time Laury felt friendliness in the gleam of his roommate's eyes.

"I—I guess not," Laury fumbled. His eyes fell before Hector's intense gaze. "I'm—I'm allergic to horror. Yes, really! When I was a boy—so my parents used to say—the goblin stories would give me terrible nightmares.

"I've never outgrown the distaste for death; sometimes it amounts almost to sickness. You know—like some people can't stand the sight of blood."

"That's the queerest thing I ever heard!" Hector exploded. He had a way of studying the person as though it were a specimen on an operating table.

Hector began to pace the room. "You should read them!" he muttered. "Broaden your outlook. Damn it, Laury, you don't really understand man until you've seen his finest criminal instincts at work!"

"I can't say I like the way you put that."

"I do like it!" Hector snapped, pinning the shorter youth against the wall. "Would you face crime like a man or a mouse, Laury? How about it?"

Right then Laury felt like a mouse, shuddering as he pushed his roommate back. "I don't like the stuff," he mumbled.

CHAPTER III

DURING the first month of lectures, seminars, and thesis consultations there was not much time for a postgrad in education to think about his roommate's ideas on crime. Occasionally there was time to think about the housekeeper's daughter, who flitted in and out of the room as briefly as the flicker of a candle.

Laury tried to hide his interest in Nina, even from himself. It irked him to come suddenly upon the girl in the shadows of the dark hallway, always with Hector hovering over her, pawing at her slight shoulders.

After two months Laury screwed up courage to ask for a date. He waited one day to meet her on the library steps. The knit dress was brown and red like the October leaves. "Hello Nina," he said breathlessly. "Tonight is Halloween. Doing anything?"

"Tonight!" she gasped. "Oh, I'm sorry. I—I'm busy tonight."

She rewarded Laury with one of her rare, fleeting smiles and he walked home in a trance. In the gloomy boarding house, climbing the creaky stairway, he muttered, "You fool! Why did you give her such short notice?"

Usually there was a musty odor in the old house; Laury noticed the difference as soon as he stepped into his room—a nauseating, unnatural sweetness.

HECTOR BAUM was curled in an overstuffed chair, his pipe dangling from stiff lips, thumbing eagerly at the crisp pages of a book. On the desk beside him smoke was rising lazily from

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a crucible, hovering a miasma of evil.

Hector tapped the book, one of the *Kancir* set. "Decided to indulge," he explained. "This sort of reading gets under your skin like a drug, you know."

"Does it?" Laury almost laughed at the idea. "What's that lousy smell?"

Hector chuckled and pointed at the smoking crucible. "Look at this," he said, holding up the book. "This will give you an idea how the boys wrote stories in the old days. It's from the foreword."

His pipe stem traced the words in heavy Gothic print:

"O, weak of heart, Beware!
Strong, poisonous words are these.
Lest mind be faint and overcome,
And human unctions cease,
Beware!
This incense, sweet and rare,
Stir well and deep inspire,
Lest strange and hideous impetus
Befoul thy mind's desire.
Beware!"

Printed below the odd verse was a row of Latin symbols.

"Believe it or not," Hector said, "that's a formula for incense. I had a hard time scraping the elements together, but I finally squeezed them out of old Haycroft over at the chem lab."

Laury sniffed distastefully. "Do you have to mix up every formula you come across?" he snapped.

Hector slapped Laury's back. "Good boy! You're improving. That's the first time I've ever heard a contrary opinion out of you. Speak for yourself, m'boy."

Laury grunted at the compliment but he noticed that Hector made no offer to extinguish the incense.

The odor was sickening. Laury drew on a topcoat and stamped angrily out of the room. Hector didn't even glance up from the pages of his book.

Laury passed the dining room on his way out. The long table was immaculate with lace cloth and gleaming silver. A long silver carving knife lay in its felt cradle. The handle was studded with gargoyle-like figures; the blade was keen. Laury shivered. Sharp surfaces always made his flesh crawl.

"I won't be in to dinner, Mrs. Wolfe," he called in the direction of the kitchen door.

IT WAS a dreary evening. Laury had never noticed before how lonesome a crowded, silent library could be. What a pity that Nina Wolfe should be wasted on a fellow like Hector!

The campus was even more of a black, unpopulated void. Laury wandered home aimlessly. Wind whined and leaves scuttled around his feet like a pack of mongrel dogs.

Mrs. Wolfe's boarding house formed a witch's shadow, the roof a peaked hat, two blinking eyes of light in the attic. That would be Otis Peebles' room. Otis was Hector's old fraternity chum from undergraduate days. Funny that Otis, knowing Hector so well, didn't room with him! Or was it?

Laury fumbled at the latch and groped awkwardly through the darkened house. On the stairway he thought of the clean-laid dining table and the sharp carving knife. Was that the surface of it shining there, gem-like, against the blackness?

He hurried up the stairway, thinking idly of the knife floating out of its sheath and gliding on some deadly mission into the night.

The bright light of his room was a relief to dark thoughts, but the air still reeked of incense. Strange that he should mind the smell so much; most incenses were pleasant.

Hector would be out on that Hallo-

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ween date with Nina, no doubt. Laury undressed miserably and was sliding into bed when he saw the open book on the desk. Gingerly he picked it up. The title was *Ecstasy and Terror*. The author was *Kancir*.

Laury lay in bed, toying idly at the pages. "Wonder what it is about crime and blood and sudden death that amuses people?" he thought.

He began to read, stumbling at first over the awkward style of the language and the unusual print. Feet sounded on the attic stairway, going down, but he scarcely heard. Hours slipped past. He read as far as the page in which Hector had inserted a bookmark. That page was the climax of mounting, horrific suspense:

Lorenzo was happy. The act was about to be performed.

He approached his victim, a magistrate, simulating a pistol. He disarmed suspicion by saying, "Sir, raise no outcry. Have no fear. These are the solemn rites of the Supreme Ecstasy." He tied the gentleman's hands. He blindfolded him and led him on a long and solemn walk. At the end he commanded him, in awesome voice, to kneel down, as it were a sacred temple.

It was not a temple. It was the portico of a public house. Imbedded in the cobble-stones of the public-way was a sharp iron blade upon which in-comers might scrape mud and refuse from their shoes.

Kneeling, the victim's head was directly above the blade.

Lorenzo proceeded expertly to slit the throat of his victim with a short dagger and then to force the open wound down upon the scraper as though the magistate had tripped, by chance, over a jutting stone, and had fallen violently on the blade.

Quickly then the bandages were removed from hands and eyes. With the bloody knife and gloves they were hidden in a nearby pond.

Lorenzo was satiate. The act was complete.

Laury suddenly dropped the book in disgust. The picture was terribly vivid. There was a mud-scraper on the library steps just like the one described. Angrily, he switched out the light over the bed and darkness lay on his eyes like a thick blindfold.

"What sort of person could conceive such stuff?" he muttered.

CHAPTER III

LAURY stretched until his toes were thrust out of the blankets, between the spindles of the bedstead, into the chill November air. Sunlight painted dazzling patterns on the frosty window.

"Wonderful!" he breathed. "I have never felt so wonderful!"

He rolled lightly out of the bed, one foot stubbing on the book that lay open on the floor. Laury rubbed his toe and grinned.

A glance at his roommate's bed revealed long hairs sprouting weirdly from the top of the sheet.

Laury danced on bare feet into the bathroom, shaved briskly with cold water, dressed swiftly in a blue suit, and trotted down the stairway with his strange morning elation.

The table in the dining room was freshly set, as ever, gleaming with polished silver. He felt vaguely that there was a subtle difference, something lacking in the picture but the feeling quickly passed.

He rubbed his palms. "First man down, Mrs. Wolfe," he bawled toward

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the closed entrance to the kitchen.

A little beak-faced woman burst through the swinging door, sombre in black linen, arms fluttering like a raven surprised into flight. She sank into a chair, red tongue darting nervously in and out of her thin white lips.

"Oh Mr. Grenfall, the most awful thing! It's enough to make a body sick!"

Laury scowled. It was such a nice morning.

"That dear Professor Haycroft who lives up the street—you know him, Mr. Grenfall; he had a terrible accident last night. He's dead!"

"Haycroft?" Laury repeated dully. "Dead?"

"There's been noise and police going up and down this street for hours. A neighbor man told me. He said Professor Haycroft seemed to have tripped and fell and cut his throat on one of those blade-things they have in front of the library to scrape mud off your shoes!"

THERE was only blankness on Laury's face, but the white skin of his throat slowly turned a yellow-green.

"Did you say—*'throat cut'?*" Laury murmured. "On a *mud-scraper?*"

"Oh yes! Isn't it ghastly, Mr. Grenfall?"

Laury tried to pull himself out of the chair, away from those piercing, bird-like eyes, but there was a strange, helpless chill in his limbs. A slow nausea crept up his throat, glazing the eyes, dulling the brain. Mental shock, sudden horror, always affected him like an anesthetic.

Mrs. Wolfe moved vaguely in and out of Laury's stupor. His lips seemed to speak empty, pointless words.

Other boarders drifted into the scene, tramping heavily in the outer hallway. Steps pounded loudly down the upper stairway and a hand jarred Laury's shoulder. "Hello, Mr. Chips!" shrilled a high male voice.

Otis Peebles sat down beside Laury, his fat, tallowy cheeks jiggling with good humor, round eyes dancing in their meaty sockets. "Something you et, Chips old boy?" he inquired.

Laury made an effort to speak and then another figure, a tall one, materialized at his other shoulder.

"Hector, your roommate seems out of sorts this morning," Peebles announced loudly to the newcomer.

"He should be, poor boy," said Mrs. Wolfe. She planted a steaming tray of omelets and bacon in the middle of the table. "That terrible accident to dear old Mr. Haycroft is enough to upset anybody."

Hector Baum slid into his chair and his shaggy eyebrows lifted, but the twisted line of his lips did not change, even when Mrs. Wolfe carefully and gruesomely described the accident.

A grim, unchallenged silence settled on the room. Laury mumbled some excuse to leave the table and glided as furtively as a thief up the creaking stairway.

A facial massage was soothing. When Laury quietly returned to the bedroom, he surprised Hector Baum poring over a book. Hector snapped it shut, his narrow shoulders twitching.

Laury snatched at something ordinary to say: "How was your Hallowe'en?"

"Halloween?" Hector said, as though he didn't understand, and then: "Oh yes—last night. Just some of the boys playing poker at Deke house."

Hector casually lighted a cigarette. "Have you read this?" he asked, handing over the book.

Laury turned *Ecstasy and Terror* in his hands. "A—a part of it," he said. "I—uh—I didn't like it!"

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Hector Baum's black eyes ran over his roomate from head to foot, and they were like spiders running across the flesh.

LAURY got away from the house. He didn't want to talk to Hector.

Without any prompting from his puzzled mind, Laury's feet turned automatically toward the campus.

The grey stone facade of the library was veiled with thick ivy. Broad concrete steps led up to granite pillars, whose stately lines seemed suddenly to have changed to ugliness.

Two policemen had roped off a section of the walk in front of the library. Sightseers pressed greedily against the ropes.

"Vampires!" Laury sneered under his breath, but he couldn't resist elbowing through the crowd.

The mud-cutter was a long, thin strip of steel socketed at each end in decorative, looping iron uprights. The blade, rusted and blunted as it was, still maintained a certain sharpness.

Laury saw the red stain that was brighter than rust. Faintness tugged at his knees. He swayed on the rope, sick with a mental picture of that blade performing its bloody task.

A uniformed detective was measuring with a tape the distance from the cutter to the rough, chipped edge of the curb. "Four and a half," the officer pronounced, and another lieutenant jotted figures in a notebook.

Drunkenly, Laury dragged himself away from the rope, numbers drumming in his brain:

Professor Haycroft must have been nearly *six feet* tall. The blade was only *four and a half feet* from the curb. A man would have to be walking swiftly, almost running, to fall with sufficient force to jugulate himself; but a swift-moving man, six feet tall, tripping on that curb, would have hit the blade *with his chest, not with his throat!*

Hounded with a dreadful, unshakeable idea, Laury desperately elbowed through knots of jabbering students. Halfway across the campus he felt a familiar slap on the back. "Don't take it so hard, Chips old boy," Otis Peebles said, spreading his bulk across the path. "What would old Haycroft say to that sour puss of yours? 'Chins up! Carry on!' he'd say. That was old Haycroft for you. Just ask Hector—"

Hector! Yes, what did Hector know about Haycroft's death? Where was Hector last night?

Laury found his hands on Peebles' shoulders, tugging at the flabby wads of muscle. "Otis, listen! Tell me something. Did you go to the poker party at the Deke house last night?"

Peebles' fat cheeks wrinkled up like biscuit dough. "The Deke house?" he snorted, quizzically. "Hell! Nobody played poker over there last night. I dropped in around midnight and the house was dead as a mausoleum! Why?"

"Nothing. I—I guess I'm just mixed up," Laury muttered, moving rapidly away.

"Chins up!" Peebles called gayly.

Hector lied about last night. Hector lied to me! Laury stopped short and held up his hands before his face and they were trembling the way the last dead leaves tremble on the vine.

THE hand was still trembling when he laid it on Mrs. Wolfe's bannister. The steep, narrow stairway faded at the top into dark emptiness. Hector would be up there, reading a book probably—

Laury turned back. He sank down on a little bench in the dark alcove behind the stairs and pressed his face against his palms. "Don't be a damned fool!" he muttered. "It's just a coin-

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cidence—a fantastic, unbelievable coincidence!"

A hand touched his shoulder and he started violently. Nina Wolfe was sitting on the bench beside him.

"I didn't hear you at all," Laury said ruefully.

"Are you sick, Laury?"

Was the girl really concerned, or was she just being friendly? It was quite dark in the alcove. Laury leaned his face closer to see her eyes. She didn't draw away.

He had never been so close to Nina before. A new emotion slowly chased the dread out of his thoughts. The house, and the stairway, and the room upstairs drifted slowly away from him. His chest tightened; he had to stand up to breathe evenly.

His hands came up from his sides lifting Nina gently by the arms. He tugged slightly at her shoulders and she moved closer, looking full in his face. Her head was thrown back so that the long brown hair fell away from her chin exposing the white throat.

"Sometimes you're beautiful!" he whispered.

"Sometimes?" she repeated, mockingly.

"I mean—I mean the sometimes that I get to see you. I was terribly lonesome last night, Nina."

"Poor boy!"

Laury stiffened. Was she laughing at him?

"Where were you? Last night, I mean," he asked lamely.

"Look who's asking questions?" the girl jeered.

Laury's tone hardened. "Were you out with Hector last night?" he demanded.

Nina tossed her head. "And what if I was?"

"How late were you with him?"

She gasped and pushed at his shoulders. "I suppose next you'll ask what we were doing!"

"I can imagine!" Laury said hoarsely. His grip tightened and he planted his lips firmly on hers.

Her quick struggling motion threw Laury off balance. He released the girl, spinning on his heel, and grabbing for the wall. His eyes swung up and back, photographing a furious, scowling face at the top of the stair-well and long, strong fingers sliding down the bannister. For a moment all three persons—Laury, Nina, and above them, Hector Baum—seemed posed in dramatic tableau, and then Hector stumped loudly down the stairs.

"Nina!" The shrill, startling voice came not from overhead but from the dining room. Mrs. Wolfe bustled into the scene. "Nina, I don't know what to do! My silver carving knife is gone; I can't find it anywhere!"

CHAPTER IV

HECTOR BAUM never spent an evening at home. His regular habit was to come in long after midnight, to undress in darkness, and slip silently into his bed opposite Laury's.

Lying awake night after night in the darkened room, waiting for his roommate's steps, Laury Grenfall grew familiar with the darkness. Every sound in the cold, dark house came to have its certain meaning. First, Mrs. Wolfe would move about testing window bolts and door locks. She slept downstairs off the parlor. Next, there would be the thump, thump of Otis Peebles' heavy shoes overhead, the groaning of bed springs under his weight. And then long hours afterward the stairs would begin a symphony of creaks announcing that Hector Baum was home. When the agony of creaking sounds ended in a rusty sigh from the bedroom door,

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Hector was in the room.

Each night the beam from a street lamp streaked through Laury's window, painting a ghostly stripe down the wall. By this faint light Laury would try to follow Hector's silent movements, try to describe to his own satisfaction the dark, shapeless objects which Hector carried in his hands.

One cold November night Laury experienced something which put a sudden stop to his sleepless night vigils. Hector was out later than ever. Laury had been staring endlessly at the oblong frame of light formed on the wall by the street lamp, fighting the fatique that was gnawing at his mind. In the center of the light was a black shadow formed by some object on Hector's desk. Laury gasped and sat upright. It was the shadow of a man!

Frantically he tugged at the cord on his bed lamp. The light came on, sweeping the shadows into the corners of the room. There was nothing on top of the roll desk but the row of little black books, held together by clumsy pottery book-ends.

Laury's chuckle was a hollow, humorless sound. He switched off the light, his eyes struggling against the sudden blankness.

The man was still there. Laury knotted the flesh of his chest with his fist as though to stifle the panic in his throat. He tried to analyze the shadow. It was not the books, because he could see the rectangular outline of them at the bottom of the silhouette. The strange shadow was above the books, not standing, but squatting—as though a twisted black gnome sat on the row of books with his chin cupped in his hands.

Laury jerked at the light cord and rolled out of bed. Only the books were on the desk. He pattered on bare feet into the bathroom where the light was brighter and went to the washbowl.

In a mirror he stared at the strangeness of his own face. The eye-sockets were dark with bluish pits. The cheeks were sunken and twisted like the wretched cores of withered, dried up apples. The skin was a livid, unhealthy white. "This is enough!" he snapped. "You'll go crazy this way!"

Another face suddenly appeared in the doorway behind him, an angular, tired face. "What goes on here?" said Hector, smiling pleasantly enough. "Look like you'd seen a ghost!"

"Nightmare, I guess," Larry said, forcing a smile.

Hector pressed a big hand on Laury's shoulder squeezing painfully. "I think you're studying too hard, friend," he said.

"I guess so," Laury muttered.

That night Laury went to sleep *before* his roommate.

BY THANKSGIVING week Laury and Hector were on the best of terms. Laury kept a control on his imagination and his physical health rapidly improved. He was not even alarmed when Hector took down another one of the *Kancir* books and proceeded to burn some more of that nauseating incense. "Don't mind me," Hector apologized. "I like to mix witches' brews, and play around with mysteries. Sort of a hobby, y'know."

Laury joked about it, but he minded enough to get out of the house for the rest of the day. In the evening he made a point of coming back to the room as soon as Hector was gone. The little black book was back in place on its shelf.

"Might as well settle this silly business once and for all," he decided.

Quickly undressing, Laury carried the book to bed with him. The title was: *Who Stalk By Night*. Laury read

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until the words swam before his eyes and sleep was irresistible. He was scarcely awake enough to replace the book on its shelf and switch out the light.

He slept so late the next morning that Hector, for a change, was up first.

"Snap out of that trance, brother," Hector urged, shaking Laury roughly awake. "You don't want to miss Mrs. Wolfe's turkey dinner. See you downstairs!"

The room still smelled faintly of Hector's incense. Laury opened the windows and dressed briskly in a flood of fresh air.

Halfway down the stairs Laury met Hector coming up again. The tall youth's face was twisted and purple with emotion. "It's Nina!" he gasped. "In the infirmary! The doctor said *severe shock!*"

They stared at each other and then scrambled headlong down the stairs.

NOT a word passed between the roommates on the taxi ride to the hospital. They fought each other to be first at Nina's bedside. Laury got hold of her hand and managed to say everything with his eyes. Hector stood looking down at the girl his face reflecting every twisted line of agony that smiled weakly from her pillow.

Nina's purple lips were loose and trembling. Her body was jammed stiffly under the sheet and little shudders rippled up from her hips to her shoulders.

It took the girl all day to tell her story —in broken little bits, between nervous spasms. Hector and Laury heard part of it; the rest they gathered from the doctor and Nina's mother.

The night before, Nina had gone out as usual with Hector. They drove Nina's car, since Hector didn't own one. There was a quarrel of some sort, and Nina dropped Hector at the boarding house shortly after midnight, driving home alone. Her sorority was only two blocks down the street at the point where University Hill dipped steeply away from the campus.

She parked on the down slope. When she bent to lock the car she saw a moving shadow behind her and heard the sound of heavy breathing.

She fought the frantic urge to run, and stepped slowly along the walk. When she moved the shadow moved. She tried to be casual but her whistle gurgled through stiff lips. She broke into a trot and the shadow trotted after.

The house was far back from the street. She ran across the lawn, lungs bursting, screams sputtering out like matches in her hot throat. In the deep shade by the house the shadow charged out of blackness, landing heavily on her back. She fell and a body sprawled over her, jamming her face into dead grass, choking her outcry.

Strong gloved fingers peeled off her own gloves, wadded them into a ball, and crammed them in her mouth. The hands fumbled under her fur coat, and she felt her dress ripping at the waist, and that was the worst moment of all, but the creature only wanted the belt to tie her hands.

The man sat on Nina's back and fumbled through her purse. She prayed that this was robbery but he tossed the purse aside and groped in her pockets. Her car keys came out with a jingle. Then the man twisted her arms and forced her to walk back to the car. He held her while he tested the keys in the door. Satisfied, he pulled her out into the dark street and forced her down, flat on her back on the hard pavement about thirty feet in front of her car.

The man stooped over her and slowly his two hands bit into her arms. He

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raised her body at the waist until her head was high above the pavement. Suddenly she sensed that he was going to beat her head on the cement with all his strength. She wriggled desperately and at the same instant a car engine roared into life. Lights stabbed out of a driveway, ripping the black night in half. The attacker quickly hid his face, dropped her with an oath, and raced away into darkness!

THE roommates had nothing to say about Nina's story on the ride home, or after.

Hector's movements were restless, almost feverish. He kept striding around the room, watching Laury furtively.

"How did you sleep last night?" Hector demanded suddenly.

The gasp died in Laury's throat. "Pretty good," he said. "Didn't even hear you come in."

"Oh, I never turn on the lights," Hector said. He jabbed the stem of his pipe at the book titled, *Who Stalk By Night*. "Have you read that?" he snapped.

The flesh tightened around Laury's throat. He tried to look unconcerned. "No! No, I never read them anymore. One was enough!"

Laury could have sworn that Hector's taut, nervous muscles relaxed and his breath hissed out in a sigh of relief!

Laury waited, trembling with impatience, until Hector left the house on an errand. As soon as the front door slammed, he snatched the book from the desk. Feverishly he thumbed the pages. It couldn't be possible, and yet he was sure he had read— Yes, there it was:

With great effort, and fearsome sounds issuing from his throat, he made the woman to lie down upon the paving stones. Once, twice, thrice he lifted the body high in his arms and swung it, as a man might swing a threshing-sack, hard upon the stones until the skull and face were something less than human.

He left the body to lie, ugly in death, and turned to the coach. Releasing the brake, he held the heavy wheel by the sheer strength of his muscles. Spoke by spoke he allowed the vehicle to roll ponderously down the slope, until the crushing weight of the giant wheel had passed over the body.

Free of his hands the coach thundered down the pavement to shatter itself against a boulder.

To all appearances death would be by accident—a woman crushed by a run-away carriage.

Was there any doubt now? There was the story between the pages of Hector's book, and last night at midnight the murderer had come to life!

Laury dropped the book on the desk and pressed his face in his hands. *Nina, that this should happen to you!*

CHAPTER V

LIEUTENANT NED CREWS was not the traditional police detective. Instead of asking questions himself he waited stubbornly for others to make conversation, to which he contributed only non-committal grunts.

Thick-bodied, a big head embedded deeply in the cavity of his sloping shoulders, ears and eyes marked with puffy scars, the lieutenant could have passed for a battered ex-heavyweight. The mahogany-leather rocker groaned feebly under his bulky six-feet-three, dressed in an ill-fitting tweed suit.

Laury and Hector sat stiffly on the

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bed looking alternately at the detective's frown and at each other.

"Are there any clues at all, Lieutenant?" Hector inquired. "I'm sort of an apprentice criminologist. If I had any lead at all, I might be able to offer something—"

The lieutenant shifted his bulk. "The keys," he muttered. "No trace of the car keys yet."

"The fellow made off with 'em, eh?" said Hector, his eyes focussing severely on Laury. "Well, why don't you start out by searching our room, Lieutenant? After all, *we* come under suspicion, don't we? We knew something about the girl's habits. I suppose if you dug down deep inside either of us, you might find some peculiar twist that would pass for a motive."

For answer the lieutenant strolled around the room poking his finger into a couple of drawers. He paused briefly before the long shelf of crime literature, toyed with Hector's chemical apparatus, and then came to the big mahogany desk and the row of black leather books. One book still lay by itself.

Laury could scarcely restrain a gasp when the detective picked up the book and carelessly thumbed the thin pages. A ragged strip of black blotter-paper fell out of the book, drifting to the floor, and the lieutenant's finger slid into its place. He began to read.

Laury tried to look at Hector but a strange paralysis of motion held his head in an iron grasp. His eyes were glued on Hector's bookmark. Fantastically, the strip of paper, edges carelessly torn, seemed to assume the shape of a little black man—not a real man, just the black silhouette of a tiny dwarf, hopping from one foot to the other, arms gesticulating wildly, head bobbing up and down as though in frantic speech.

There was a strange, hoarse voice and Laury realized that his own lips were speaking: "Lieutenant! There—there's something I'd like to know!"

Lieutenant Crews looked up, his eyes tightly squinting. He snapped the book shut.

Laury knotted and unknotted his fists. Why had he spoken? What was his crazy imagination doing to him? It was Hector who should have been afraid, who should have tried to stop the lieutenant from reading that book. This Laury Grenfall, coming to the rescue of his roommate, was a stranger to himself.

"Look here," Laury blurted, lamely. "We—we're—Hector and I—we're pretty fond of Nina Wolfe. We'd like to know why anyone should want to harm her, of all poeple?"

"Harm?" Hector Baum leaped off the bed, pacing the floor in long, nervous strides. *"Kill* is the word, I should say! That was no ordinary attacker last night! Let me tell you something! Lots of people think that passion is a single emotion. I know different. Really it's a crazy mixture of emotions, and you can't always say where or how it will vent itself—sometimes in love, sometimes in jealousy, sometimes in *murder!"*

"Who could possbly have a feeling like that toward Nina Wolfe?" Laury demanded.

Hector turned fiercely on his roommate. "Who couldn't!" he snapped.

For the first time Lieutenant Crews' eyes appeared to be wide awake. "You seem to understand a murderer's psychology," he said to Hector.

Hector shrugged impatiently. "Understand?" he said. "Of course I understand murder. I am a student of murder!"

FOR the next few weeks Laury could detect no outward changes in his

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strange relationship with Hector Baum. They were both cordial enough, but Laury knew that the deep inward senses of both were alert, studying each other.

During the holidays Laury was left alone; the atmosphere, in Hector's absence, seemed to be cleaner in more ways than one.

Then Hector returned, friendlier than before; the white snow season arrived overnight, and skating on Colfax Lake was everybody's sport.

It was a full month before Laury again surprised Hector reading one of the little black books. Hector casually laid the book aside. "I'm taking Nina skating tonight," he informed him. "Thought some lively night air would do her good."

Laury agreed, but the old queer dread began to gnaw at him. He waited restlessly until his roommate was gone for the evening before he dared to look at Hector's book.

Laury stared at the title and felt the hairs tingling on his scalp: *The Frozen Death!*

He thumbed quickly through the pages, skimming the words until his eyes snatched at a fragment of a paragraph:

> *. . . at the far edges after the warmth of day the ice was thin and treacherous. A quick shove, a scream lost in distance, and the body would be swallowed in icy oblivion.*
>
> *The cold of the night would seal the break and tight enclose the watery tomb.*

The book dropped from Laury's stiffened fingers. Hector Baum was skating with Nina!

For a moment the panic was like a cold hand at his throat. Then he snatched his coat from a hook and raced out of the house and across lots to the lake.

A quick shove, a scream lost in distance—Nina! It would be so easy to drown a woman in a frozen lake!

THE skaters were thickest along Lake avenue where the street lamps cast little puddles of light on the ice through the skeleton branches of great oaks. Laury recognized Otis Peebles skating near a huge bonfire.

"Seen Nina and Hector?" Laury panted.

"Yeah they're around," said Otis, his clownish body cutting figure-eights around Laury. "Must be over on Shangri-La. That's strictly Lover's Lane over there."

"How long?" Laury gasped.

"Haven't seen 'em for an hour. What gives? You're pale as a snow man."

Laury darted across the slippery ice toward the dark huddle of an island in the middle of the lake. Very few skaters ever ventured to Shangri-La, where the night was too dark for sport.

Laury scuttled along the edge of the island, looking for moving shadows against the snow. He almost stumbled over a long log that projected onto the ice. Two live shadows were crouched low, the larger one stooping queerly over the other. The smaller shadow seemed to bend backward in a weird semi-circle and two long arms came together at its throat. Hoarse, panting breath was the only sound.

Laury slid into the man without a word, ripping his arms from the woman's body and sprawling with him on the sharp grooves of ice. They fought silently, rolling and sliding, neither one able to gain his feet. Hector —Laury knew it was he—knotted the muscles of his long arms trying to break the tight loop of Laury's arms. Laury felt a strange, wonderful elation in the

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unexpected strength of his own grip.

Far in the distance, it seemed, outside this crazy, shadowy world that rolled around their heads, a woman screamed and faint shouts answered.

Laury's head scraped and pounded on the ice and he dug his teeth into Hector's shoulder to stop the grinding of his jaws. Slowly the body pressed in his arms seemed to give way and the breath came out in little choking spasms.

Lights suddenly danced around the fighters and many hands tugged at their bodies. Voices babbled. They had to pry loose Laury's arms.

Laury was jerked to his feet. Hector hung limply in someone's arms. A hot torch was pushed between their faces and a girl screamed: "Laury!"

"You murderer!" Laury cried, pushing his face at Hector.

Nina Wolfe's head bobbed between them and her hands pawed at Laury's lapels. "What are you saying, Laury? What are you trying to do?"

Laury tried to shake off the dull throb in his brain. "He—he was going to kill you!" he stammered. "I saw—I saw his hands on your throat!"

Nina flung herself away and threw her arms around Hector's neck. "Laury, you must be mad!" she gasped. "Hector just asked me to marry him."

CHAPTER VI

LAURY never remembered just how he escaped that circle of staring faces. Hector came in at midnight without a word.

The roommates lay silently in their twin beds and it seemed to Laury that even in the darkness they were watching each other, aware of every fitful movement through the whole long night.

The next day was a Saturday. After a glum, wordless breakfast Hector very deliberately proceeded to read the book which had so alarmed Laury.

Laury tried to study but he could feel Hector's eyes glancing furtively at his back, boring into his thoughts.

Did the man exercise some hypnotic power, that it was possible to be so afraid of him and yet lack the will to do anything about it? That first show of courage last night was a miserable fiasco! Hector had not even read *The Frozen Death* before he went skating with Nina.

As an afterthought, Hector brewed some more of the odious incense which quickly drove Laury out of the house. Hector ignored Laury's exit. His long body was knotted up in the chair, as though he personally felt the agonies of the story.

Laury stayed away until late evening to avoid Hector, but they met again on the walk in front of the boarding house.

The long hedge of evergreens was spotted with Christmas lights, like a row of brightly-plumed cadets. Laury and Hector stood ankle-deep in snow breathing frosty spectres around their heads.

Hector calmly lighted a cigarette before he spoke. "I've got a date with Nina," he said, a sneer uncurling on his lips. "Will that be all right with you?"

"I wish I knew," Laury said boldly. "I'm going to marry her. What do you know about that?"

Hector walked straight toward the street, his shoulder crowding Laury into deep snow. Laury shuddered at the contact, which was somehow colder than the night coldness. He hurried up to the empty room.

There was no avoiding the book this time. Laury quickly undressed, dived into bed, and gulped down the tale like a starving man.

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There were hints of drownings in icy lakes, but actually *The Frozen Death* was the stab of a sharp, thick icicle, which melted into the victim's blood, leaving only the gaping wound and no weapon. Laury read until his mind was drugged with mounting horror. It seemed that the very pages gave off a sickening, noxious perfume. He hurled the book angrily in the direction of Hector's desk.

"It's all damned nonsense!" he grumbled. "It must be nonsense!"

He lay back wearily on the pillow and watched the cobwebs on the ceiling spin themselves into long cones that fattened and hardened into huge, fang-like icicles.

LAURY woke with a feeling of unutterable content. The morning had no room for black doubts. The frost on the window, the smell of fried bacon, the steady *clink, clink* of auto chains—these were sane, believable things. Even Hector Baum seemed handsome and very human in sleep. How could a man be afraid of anything, when life was like this?

He dressed with great energy. A brisk walk in the chill peace of dawn should start the day right. Huddled in a topcoat, Laury stepped from Mrs. Wolfe's porch into a thick layer of snow, fresh fallen. The evergreen hedge sparkled with bright colors. He paused, struck with that annoying sense of something wrong, but he couldn't account for it.

He had almost reached the hedge, trying vainly to follow the line of the sidewalk, when his foot tripped on something long and stiff, buried in the snow. He fumbled in the stuff for a fallen branch. His gloved fingers grasped something hard and crooked, and out of the snow emerged a human foot.

Shrieking like a woman, Laury pawed at the drift, exposing legs and a fat, twisted trunk, and finally the ghastly frozen head, clotted with crystals of blood. It was the body of Otis Peebles, and out of the base of his bare throat protruded the butt of a huge icicle!

Laury's mind blanked. Somewhere along the street he ran into a man, tugged at his arm, and babbled, "Dead man! Murder! Must call police. Mrs. Wolfe's boarding house. My friend—Otis Peebles, my friend!"

CHAPTER VII

MURDER TERRORIZES UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Two Dead, Girl Attacked; Police Suspect Homicidal Maniac Prowling City

THERE was no denying the headlines, the crowds of onlookers lining the street, or the little clusters of policemen tramping in and out of the house. Murder had reached Mrs. Wolfe's doorstep.

Hector Baum followed the detectives around all day, jotting notes on a little pad, but Laury sat stiffly in his room, answering questions automatically, unable to mouth his fantastic secret. Murderers come to life out of storybooks! Things like that didn't happen in a sane world.

Lieutenant Crews was in and out, poking fat fingers aimlessly in drawers, or standing, hands on hips, waiting for Laury to speak. It was night again before the lieutenant shrugged and gave up—the last officer to leave.

Laury felt the gloomy house closing in on him again. He caught the lieutenant on the stairs, clutched at his thick arm.

"Well?" growled the detective.

"Listen," Laury whispered. "There

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is something. Don't ask me to tell you now. If only I was sure; I've got to have proof! Is there any clue, any clue at all, that might be traced to this murderer? I want to help, believe me!"

The detective chewed his thick lips doubtfully. "I can tell you one thing," he said: "I'm looking for a thin, curved piece of red glass."

That was all he would say. At the time Laury did not understand.

LAURY gave Mrs. Wolfe a week's notice. How he would live through a week of sleepless, terrifying nights was too much even to consider, but he dared not run away under the eyes of the police.

On the second evening of that terrible week he noticed the missing book. There were six in the *Kancir* set, but Laury counted only five on the desk. *Ecstasy and Terror, Who Stalk By Night, The Frozen Death, This Solid Flesh,* and *Return To Dust*—what title was missing?

He conducted a reckless search through Hector's belongings and found the book crammed into an old pair of boots: *The Dripping Heart.*

Hastily, with quick, nervous glances at the door, he scanned the story. At the end his hands were moist with cold sweat and his teeth rattled and grated uncontrollably. The book told of a lover who cut the living heart out of his rival and presented it as a wedding gift to his bride!

This was too horrible even to consider; he was sorry he had ever read the stuff. Damn it, he would have the whole thing out with Hector tonight! Danger face to face was not half as dreadful as the endless, uncertain dark.

Hector was late as ever. He scarcely glanced at Laury, marching to his closet and jerking out a big overnight bag. He threw the bag on his bed and began tossing articles into it from a bureau drawer.

Laury tightened his narrow shoulders and clutched at Hector's arm. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

"I'm eloping with Nina Wolfe, that's what!" Hector snarled through set teeth.

Laury thought of the story he had just read and something seemed to give way deep in his chest, but he would not retreat. He jerked three of the *Kancir* books from the desk and pushed them at Hector.

"Hector, I've read these books," he said coldly. "Do you know what I mean?"

Hector's scragged brows stretched to a thin line. "You have read them?" he breathed, and let the books slide from his fingers to the floor. "So have I, Laury."

"This one too!" Laury held up *The Dripping Heart.*

They stood inches apart, both bodies trembling with unnatural tension. Hector's eyes bulged and his head waggled from side to side.

Simultaneously, the eyes of both lighted on an object which Hector had just tossed into the bag. In the bottom half of a flat, oblong box, sheathed snugly in red felt, was a long gleaming razor.

Like runners released at the shot of a gun they dived for the deadly blade. Laury's hand closed on the box and he rolled over once on the bed, coming up with the razor dangling from his fingers.

Hector did a strange thing then. His legs crumpled and his long body folded into a quivering heap on the floor. His face was an inhuman mask, the bones almost bursting from the livid flesh. The gasps from his throat were like stifled screams. A hand shot out, clutching the door knob and dragging his body through the door, where it

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slithered, snake-like, down the stairs gathering legs and arms as it reached the lower hall to bolt wildly through the door.

LAURY hooked a chair under the door handle. "Tonight," he muttered, "I will sleep alone."

He sat down heavily on the bed, bewildered by Hector's actions. If only there was a single honest clue, the kind that police could understand!

A piece of red glass—he tried to fit the lieutenant's clue into the picture of Otis Peebles' body lying in the snow. What had he seen that morning?

Suddenly, as clearly as though he were standing there on Mrs. Wolfe's porch, Laury recalled the dawn haze and the queer arrangement of Christmas lights on the evergreen hedge. Mrs. Wolfe was always forgetting to turn them off at night, but that awful morning only the lights on the *left* side of the hedge were burning.

A piece of red glass, thin and curved. Of course! On certain types of strings, if a single bulb is broken, the whole circuit goes out. The murderer must have broken one of the red light globes!

It didn't take any detective mind to guess the Lieutenant's clue. If a piece of broken bulb was missing it might be embedded in the murderer's rubber heels or caught in his clothing. Immediately Laury was scrambling on hands and knees through the closet, peering at the heels and soles of Hector's shoes, but there was no sign of red glass on any of them.

Moving out of the closet, Laury's foot struck a hidden shoe and kicked it into the light. Some crumbs of mud broke loose from the sole and he swept them into his palm. Winking up at him, buried in the biggest clod, was a long, oval sliver of red glass.

The terrifying, indescribable sickness which he had felt on the bloody library steps came back to him. He had to lie flat on the bed.

The shoe was a tan summer Oxford —*his own shoe!*

His mind seemed to shatter like an exploding skyrocket. Desperately, he tried to recollect his frantic, winged thoughts: Could Hector Baum have worn his roommate's shoes—shoes kept shelved in winter? Could he have disguised himself in Laury's clothing to carry out his murderous plots?

Laury managed to roll off the bed and drag out a pair of Hector's oxfords. His own small feet were lost in them. Hector could not possibly have squeezed his feet into those guilty shoes!

CHAPTER VIII

LAURY did not sleep that night. His body snarled itself crazily in the blankets, while his mind snatched at possibilities only to toss them aside.

If Hector was not the murderer, then who——?

Who else could have read those books, could have borrowed Laury's shoes, and gone out by night to kill? Who else——?

The college chimes tolled three A.M., sounding like a death-knell in his heart.

One, *who else?* Two, *who else?* Three——

Suddenly a cry tore itself out of his throat and he leaped wildly out of bed. He ripped coats and trousers off of hooks, jabbed his hands into pockets, and tossed the garments into a pile. His own spring suit was the last. In the right hand pants pocket he found them—the missing keys to Nina Wolfe's car.

The search grew in frenzy. A pair of black silk gloves, seldom worn, were missing from his trunk.

Terror took hold of him, dancing his

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body like a puppet on a string. Somehow he found himself dressed in a coat, floundering drunkenly down the shadowy stairway. Dawn had barely touched the sky when he was out of the house, plowing through snow to the library.

He kneeled down beside the mud-cutter, where Professor Haycroft had died. With his eyes clamped shut Laury enacted in his mind a terrible murder with a silver carving knife.

The thing that he sought gradually came to mind. Unerringly, guided by a dark, subconscious memory, he marched toward Colfax Lake. At a spot where the roots of two great oaks were wedded firmly together, he crouched beside the lake, broke the ice, and fumbled in the icy water.

The flat rock was there all right. He raised an edge of it and pulled out a soggy lump of cloth—two stained black gloves pierced in the middle by a long silver carving knife.

There was the final proof: *Hector Baum was no murderer. Laurens Grenfall was the man who read of murder and rose from his bed in sleep to match the deed!*

WALLS have a way of tightening like a strangle-hold about a man who looks too long upon them. Two weeks of self-imprisonment shriveled Laury Grenfall into a husk.

It was awful to live in the same room with a murderer—a thousand times worse to live in the same soul with one! A man didn't have to voice his thoughts. They spoke out to him from the shadows.

Psychologists know something of nightmares and sleep-walking, but what of men who walk in sleep to murder? . . . Can the mind of a man be made up of two halves, independent of each other, good and bad, conscious and subconscious? . . . What of the books? Was there really a Gypsy curse on the works of *Kancir,* seeping into the readers' mind like an evil, cancerous disease? . . . The incense! Was that strange chemical brew truly a protection, as the book said, or was that warning passage of verse a monstrous trick? Was the incense a fiendishly concocted poison paralyzing the moral processes of the mind? . . .

Days dragged by. The police were oddly silent. What did they know, what had they guessed of the truth? Damn them! Why did they dangle a man on a spit, roasting him alive over the agonizing flames of doubt?

Why didn't they come and take him? Anything to escape that room, those throbbing walls, that damnable *Kancir* and his horrid, fascinating secrets. Hector Baum was right: there was a strange magnetism in the books which could hardly be denied. The reading of them had become an insidious habit; to do without them was like slow starvation.

Two books were still unread. Laury felt somehow that the answer to his dilemma was in the books themselves, that there was no escape from their evil influence until he had read them all. Could he risk it? Would the incense really protect him? Was it that which had saved the soul of Hector Baum?

ON the fourteenth night of self-torture Laury could stand the accusing shadows no longer. He jerked a book from the shelf and fumbled the pages. Carefully he studied the formula for incense. The Latin symbols meant nothing but the numerals were understandable: He had watched Hector mixing the stuff:

Five drops of that thickish yellow liquid in the crucible; a thimble of water; heat slowly and stir in two pinches of the white powder.

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Enchanted he watched the bubbling yellow scum change to green, then blue, then purple, to become at last a bright blood red. Nauseating aromatic vapor rose slowly from the crucible.

Laury pulled a chair into the light of the crooked lamp-stand. He selected the last of the six books—*Return To Dust*—with trembling, ecstatic fingers, half-eager, half-afraid, like a drug addict preparing his potion.

He dragged slowly through the story. Toward the last his breath flowed more freely. There was nothing to fear in this tale—nothing, that is, until the very last page:

Damon had lost. Ralf had escaped the death trap and had found his place in Celia's heart.

So it was meant to be, Damon reasoned. But he would not be denied his own place. The note would take care of that, the note directing that his trunk be locked and shipped to Celia and Ralf.

That done, he drew his knife, wormed his way into the trunk, closed it upon himself, and plunged the blade into his own heart.

Laury raised his head stiffly, numbness seeping through his veins. The lamplight cast the shadow of his head and shoulders on the wall. To his horror the head seemed to be bloating to huge, unnatural proportions and then he saw that it was not his head at all but the shadow of a tiny black dwarf standing on the man's shoulders, dancing weirdly, bending itself double as though in raucous laughter.

Laury hid his face in fear-shrunken hands. "God have mercy!" he moaned. "I cannot remain awake forever!"

« « SCIENTIFIC ODDITIES » »

By LYNN STANDISH

ACCORDING to some experts, the automobile of 1942 is definitely a thing of the past in performance and appearance as well as age and once this war is over and the new models appear no one will want to keep his 1942 car. In fact, the post-war engine will be so efficient that no one will be foolish enough to maintain the expensive 1942 engine. There will also be other improvements in looks as well as economy. The engine will probably be placed in the rear to give the driver greater vision, and diesel motors will be found in many models.

About the only thing that will remain unchanged will be the familiar names although new ones may appear.

* * *

IT MAY be hard to believe but ilmenite, a substance blacker than coal, is used to produce titanium dioxide, the whitest substance known to man.

* * *

ALTHOUGH all the present production of nylon is going into war production, the research chemists of the Du Pont industries have not stopped looking for new uses for their product.

The latest discovery to be announced is that nylon can be used to produce screens that will never rust or have to be painted. By weaving single heavy strands of nlyon they have been able to produce a strong screen which can be colored for the life of the screen by introducing pigments into the molten nylon. The screen is flexible enough to be used in the roll-type screens.

* * *

THE trunk of an elephant has approximately 40,000 muscles and is the strongest single organ possessed by an animal. Elephants have been know to lift a ton or throw a man 120 feet using their trunk.

* * *

ABOUT 50% of the electrical power used in the Ford plant to make a Pratt and Whitney engine is produced by engines just recently completed. As the engines come off the assembly line they are taken to the test rooms where they are given a final check.

Instead of wasting the power produced, the huge engines are coupled to generators which feed power into the service lines of the shop. Just another case of American ingenuity to help win the war.

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MOST of us regard the earth's surface as anything but smooth, but if we took the most carefully manufactured and polished ball bearing and expanded it to the earth's size, its surface would be rougher than our earth's surface.

* * *

ENGINEERING science has developed a mobile 2,500-kilowatt transformer substation that is mounted on a truck for use in emergencies. If a town or area suddenly is cut off from its regular supply of power through a bombing or through accident, the truck can be rushed there in a short time to supply the vital power until the necessary repairs are made. The transformer is able to take high-voltage current from the transmission lines and reduce the voltage so that it can continue its journey along lower voltage lines or even reduce the voltage to that required by the consumers of the town. Thus war plants would not have to cease production if the power station was knocked out by enemy bombs providing the main power lines were still up.

* * *

A LITTLE over a year ago, a well was being drilled for water in Eastern Wyoming when at a depth of 156 feet a gas was given off. A sample of the gas was sent for analysis to the laboratory of the U. S. Geological Survey located in Casper, Wyoming, where it was found to be 100% nitrogen. This is supposed to be the first nitrogen gas well ever discovered.

* * *

PLANTERS growing pineapples in Queensland, Australia, have discovered that calcium carbide can be used to shorten the growing time of their crops.

The calcium carbide is placed in the heart of the leaf cluster when the plant is in bud and the rain reacts with it to produce acetylene gas which hastens the growing. Thus more crops can be produced each year due to the shorter growing period.

* * *

A NEW source of riboflavin, one of our most important vitamins, may have been found in whey, which is an almost useless dairy by-product, according to Dr. A. Leviton of the Bureau of Dairy Industry in the U. S. Department of Agriculture. He has discovered that by condensing whey to a point where milk sugar crystals are formed that riboflavin is absorbed on the crystals. In tests he has been able to produce almost 300 micrograms of the vitamin for one grain of milk sugar.

* * *

RECENTLY a new alloy was perfected by metallurgists in the Westinghouse laboratories so that we are no longer dependent upon China and Burma for tungsten to produce cutting steel. Instead the new alloy contains molybdenum which is very plentiful in the U. S., where about 90% of the world's supply is found. In fact, the new alloy has produced such good results and is so much cheaper than the tungsten alloy that it will continue to be used even after the war.

* * *

AMONG human workers it is usually pretty easy to spot the loafers. But among hens this was a difficult problem—that is, until the New York State College of Agriculture conducted a little research.

They discovered that if a hen has slick feathers and yellow shanks at the close of the laying year, they have been loafing on the job. The food they have eaten has been used to grow new feathers.

The sure signs of the hard workers are dry, frayed feathers, bright red comb, faded beak and shanks, soft skin, pliable abdomen, and well spread bones. Most of their feed has been converted into the laying of eggs. These are the hens to keep while the loafers should be sent to market.

So gold-bricking hens beware. We know your secret and you'd better get on the job or else grace the table for someone's Sunday dinner.

* * *

USING wood from wrecked enemy planes for the Communion rail, the men of an R.A.F. Wellington night bomber wing in North Africa recently built their own "parish church" in the desert.

The church consists of two tents fronted by an ancient Arab archway, and topped by a wooden cross. Shell cases serve as altar vases, bomb containers as seats, and old flare boxes as choir stalls. The sandy floor was lowered two feet to provide sufficient headroom. Steps were then cut, and large strips of canvas stretched over the dunes for a carpet.

An organ, bought with money subscribed by the fliers, makes the chapel complete. In addition to regular Sunday services, there are daily services and Bible classes. The church is also used for classical concerts.

All squadrons—and men of all denominations—took part in the work, each unit volunteering to construct a particular section.

* * *

BEFORE the war, storage tanks for oil, gas, and other volatile liquids were coated with aluminum paint which was able to deflect heat and thus kept the tanks cool. But in time of war aluminum painted tanks make an excellent target for bombing planes and thus some substitute had to be found.

Over a year ago, Paul L. Hexter, vice president of the Arco Company, announced that after much experiment and research his company had perfected a paint that would deflect heat and yet be hardly visible from the air. The paint has been produced in several colors so that it will blend with green foliage, black earth, or even the desert tan. After successfully passing rigid army and navy tests, the new paint is now being widely used.

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Benny went rigid with fear as he saw a gun protruding from the car window

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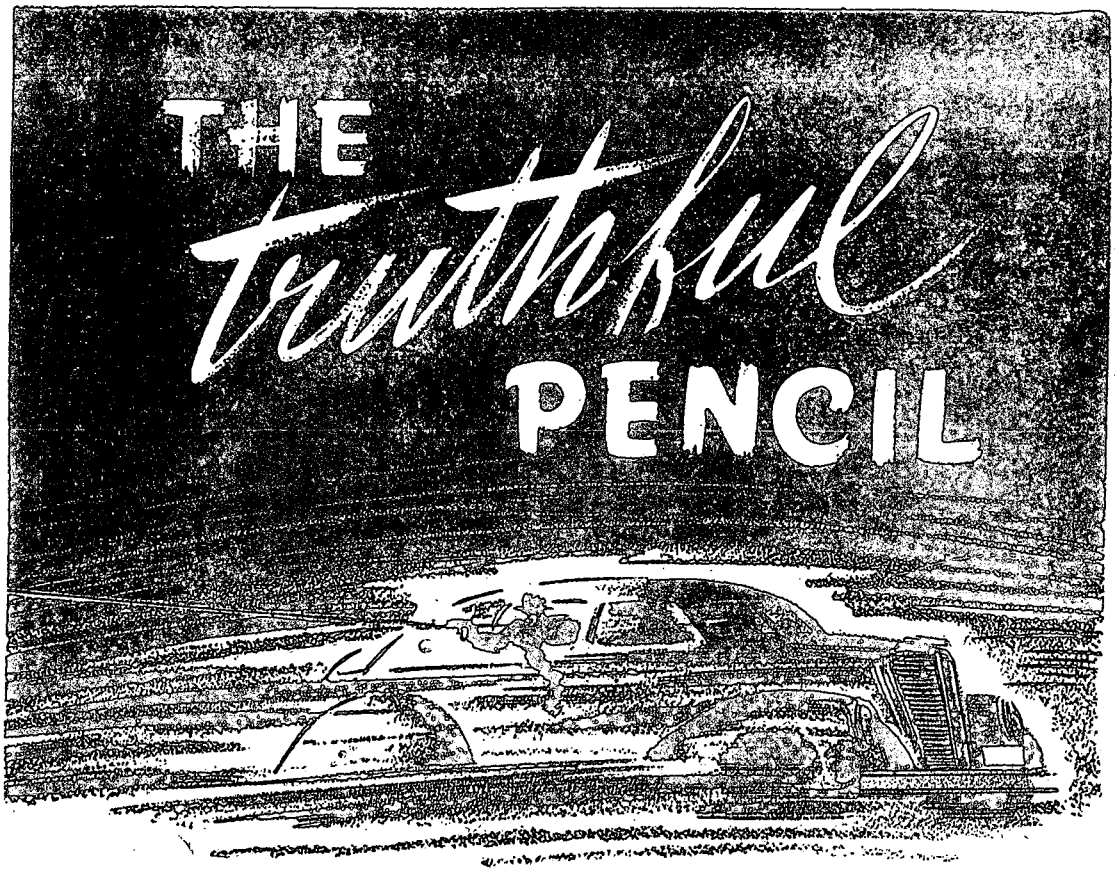

ILLUSTRATED BY ARNOLD KOHN

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

Everything worked perfectly for Joe Lacey until he made the fatal error of using a pencil to pull a double-cross

AS JOE MAYBRICK, an interested spectator of life as it goes on at Joe's Mansion, a Van Buren street flop-house, put it:

"Benny the Pencil is a mooch with a menace. A menace to any guy what's got the moola."

Willie the Weep, to whom Joe voiced the observation, asked:

"What's Benny got, that the rest of us haven't?"

"Have you ever been around when Benny's hit some sucker for a dime and gets only a nickel?" Joe asked.

Willie said he hadn't.

"Then what the hell am I telling you this for?" Joe said in disgust, walking away from the hotel desk.

"Yuh don't have to get so hot about it," Willie shouted at the retreating fig-

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ure. "I've got my own mooching to take care of. An' if you think——"

He stopped yelling when he discovered that Joe had disappeared into his office.

BENNY THE PENCIL, his patchwork quilt of an overcoat flapping around his ankles, stepped into the Manhattan Tea Room. Not that it was the sort of weather that made the wearing of an overcoat necessary. An August sun beat mercilessly down on Chicago's Loop and only those who catered to the dictates of fashion wore their jackets. But not Benny. He wore his coat in all kinds of weather.

So hot was it, that Ripples, the fat bartender, on seeing Benny come in, said:

"Will you take that damned coat off, Benny; things are hot enough around here."

"So it's hot. So what? So you'll sell more beer. So what?"

"So shut up," Ripples yelled, "Peddle those damned pencils and get out!"

"So——" Benny began; but Ripples had turned away to go back to Traffic Officer Finnegan, immersed in a Racing Form, at the far end of the bar.

"Phooie," Benny spat out, his coal black eyes venomous in the dark caverns of their sockets.

He stood for a moment in silence, a skinny hand jiggling the tin cup which held twenty or twenty-five pencils. Then, with a sudden swoop, he was on his first victim: a truck driver.

"Buy a pencil and help a poor duff out, mister," he said in a monotone, while the pencils chattered a rattling accompaniment.

The truck driver, whose entire attention was wrapped up in the stein of beer he was fondling, turned a startled face to Benny and said: "Huh?"

"Whassa matter? Yuh deaf?" Benny snarled. "I said, will yuh buy a pencil?"

The truck driver picked a nickel up from out of the change, which lay beside his beer and throwing it into the cup, selected a pencil.

"Sure," he smiled agreeably, as he pocketed the pencil. "And there's a nickel for it."

A strange silence descended on the Manhattan Tea Room. Something like the silence which precedes an artillery barrage.

Ripples suddenly appeared before the truck driver.

"Better toss another nickel in the cup," he softly suggested.

"Why?" the driver wanted to know.

"Don't ask any questions; just do like I say," Ripples replied.

"Nuts to you—and to him too," the truck driver said, jerking his head toward Benny. He returned to caressing the beer stein as though his answer had settled all further talk.

"O. K., brother," Ripples said as he walked away. "But don't say I didn't warn you."

Benny had been a silent spectator to the conversation.

"That your truck out there, mister?" he asked.

"Yeah; why?"

"Be kind of tough if you walked out and found a flat tire, wouldn't it?" Benny replied.

The trucker was no longer smiling when he turned to face Benny again.

"Say, what the hell goes in this joint? Does the bartender split on your take? What's all this double-talk, anyhow?" he said, exasperation and anger mingling inharmoniously in his voice. "Now beat it, bum, before I get mad!"

"So O. K., mister," Benny said, moving off to his next victim. "But it'd be cheaper to throw another nickel in the cup."

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The trucker gave Benny a sour look, finished the beer in the stein, and went out to his truck. And right into trouble!

A TRAFFIC cop on a horse was busily engaged in writing out a traffic violation ticket against a window of the truck. Then, to fill the driver's cup of woe to the brim, he discovered that one of his tires was flat. He stood there, clenched hands on hips, stonily looking at the flat tire.

"What a mess," he groaned, "a traffic ticket and a flat tire." Then he remembered Ripples' warning and Benny's curious remark about a flat tire.

Benny had just started his spiel to a dark-haired, quiet-faced man at the bar when he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder.

So hard did the trucker pull Benny around, that he almost pulled him out of his coat.

"Why you no good son of a bum! You—"

His anger was so great Benny cowered back in fear. But before the trucker could act, Finnegan had him by the arm.

"Easy there, bud," Finnegan cautioned. He kept a restraining hand on the trucker's arm. "Easy does it. Now what's the trouble?"

"Why, you heard the whole thing, Officer," the trucker ranted. "This bum is to blame for the whole thing."

"To blame for what?"

"My flat tire!"

Finnegan sighed windily. There were times, such as now, when he wished that Benny would go to some other patrolman's beat.

"Look, buddy," Finnegan explained. "the bum couldn't have had anything to do with it, because he was here all the time. And he didn't know that you were only going to give him a nickel. Besides, Ripples told you to give him a dime. Now don't ask me why, but if you'd have given him a dime, nothing would have happened."

"Don't ask me why! Don't ask me why!" the trucker said sarcastically. "That's all I get. Well, I'm asking: Why?"

"It's like this, bud," the burly policeman explained somewhat lamely. "Benny doesn't like to take a nickel. And he has a bad habit of wishing bad luck on the guy who gives him one, that's all. Except that what Benny wishes, usually happens."

The trucker, his face suddenly pale, backed away from Finnegan.

"Holy cats!" he whispered in fright. "They're all nuts in here!"

He turned and ran through the door as though pursued by the devil himself.

Strangely enough, Benny, who should have been displaying some interest in the conversation, had seemingly forgotten the incident altogether. The quiet-faced man and he were silently facing each other.

Their eyes seemed to probe from behind the veils of their lids, as though in search of something which each knew must be there.

A V-shaped smile, saturnine and malicious, came into life on the quiet face of the slender stranger.

"They would have hanged you as a witch, in the Salem days," the stranger said softly.

Benny looked blank.

The V smile deepened on the stranger's face until it seemed to end at his ears.

"So you want me to buy a pencil?" he asked.

He began to laugh softly, slyly.

"No, I will not buy; instead, we

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will trade. This pencil, for one of yours."

With that, he reached into the inner pocket of his jacket and pulled out a pencil similar to those Benny carried in his cup.

BENNY took the proffered pencil and looked at it suspiciously. But it seemed no different from any of his, except that his carried the manufacturer's name.

"Looks all right," Benny grinned, showing yellow stumps of teeth.

"And why shouldn't it be all right?" the stranger asked.

Benny shrugged his shoulders, making his overcoat flap. For a second the stranger's reference to witches was clear. All Benny needed just then was a broomstick and a black cat to be in character. With his long, thin, curving nose, which seemed to be reaching toward his pointed, out-thrust chin; his skinny, taloned hands; his dark, malevolent eyes—no wonder some people shied clear of him.

"Coming from you," Benny went on, "it makes me wonder."

The stranger's eyes went dark and piercing in a sudden intense look. Benny's head nodded once, as though a message had been conveyed and acknowledged. Then, without another word, Benny turned and walked out of the Manhattan Tea Room.

It was the tail end of the morning when Benny showed up before the blank, frosted-glass door which was the entrance to the Joe Lacey Enterprises.

BENNY walked past the two muscle-men who were seated in the outer office and opened the door to Joe's private sanctum. Joe was on the phone speaking to one of his "enterprises."

"Listen, ya jerk," Joe was saying, "when I send a guy down for a hundred, I don't want him to come back with fifty."

Even Benny could hear the frightened stutter which came from the earpiece of the cradle phone.

"Yeah, yeah," Joe's rasping voice answered the stutter. "I know business is bad. But that's your lookout, not mine. And if you don't want to go out of business altogether, just see my boys when they come around!"

With those parting words of wisdom, Joe slammed the phone down on its cradle and said to Benny:

"What the hell do you want? Money, I suppose. I've got enough of your pencils to go into business for myself. But do you ever stay away from me? No, not you, you State Street mooch. Well, come here!" Joe suddenly yelled to the frightened scarecrow. "This is the last time you mooch me."

"What're ya gonna do, Joe," Benny wailed as he sidled over to the desk where Lacey was sitting.

"This is the last time, Benny," Joe said, as he pulled a pencil out of the cup. His other hand pulled a coin out of his vest pocket and tossed it into the tin cup. It was a nickel.

"Not a nickel!" Benny moaned. "That's bad luck!"

"Yeah, but that's all they're worth. Now beat it. I'm busy."

"So all right, Joe, but maybe you won't like that pencil," Benny said to himself as he went out.

Lacey had taken the pencil the stranger had given to Benny.

JOE LACEY was an imposing-looking man, particularly when seated at a desk. He looked, in fact, as one would expect a bank vice-president or a department store executive to look. His regular features always gave the impression that their owner had just

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stepped out from a barber chair. In a word, Lacey was well-groomed.

Just now, however, a frown spoiled the otherwise imposing appearance of that face. Joe Lacey was worried. And nervous.

He was twirling the pencil which he had taken from Benny about in his fingers when the phone rang suddenly. Joe's fingers tightened convulsively, and the pencil snapped in two.

"Hello," he said, his voice uncertain. . . . "Yes, this is me, Slim, What d'ya want now."

He listened in silence for a few seconds, then, almost in a panic, said:

"Now wait, Slim. Where am I going to get a thousand dollars? You know damn well the D.A. has got the heat on and my collections are off. Make it five hundred."

His face, usually pink from massage, had gone brick red. Perspiration had begun to trickle down his plump cheeks. He pulled a handkerchief from his breast pocket and dabbed furiously at the streaming pores.

The metallic whine of his caller's voice kept buzzing into his ear. He listened to what Slim was saying, then in a tired, hopeless voice said:

"All right, Slim. You win—as usual. I don't know where I'll get it, but you'll have the cash tomorrow. Yes," he concluded, "at the usual place."

His eyes remained on the phone after he had hung up. But they were empty. He was no longer the rough, tough character who had brow-beaten Benny. He was just a tired old man right now. A tired old man, with the sword of Damocles hanging over his head. Only it wasn't a sword; it was Slim Masconi.

"I suppose this is the pay-off," his thoughts went. "Slim plays for keeps, and all I got to do is miss just once, and he'll do just what he's always threatened. I'll have to pay off."

He sighed resignedly as his eyes came to rest on the day's newspaper lying on his desk.

"Might as well stop worrying about that," he said aloud, as he turned the news sheets till he reached the sport pages. "Let's see what's going at the tracks today."

Joe Lacey had one bad habit, about which everyone knew. He was a sucker for the horses. Not just an ordinary sucker. When Joe Lacey laid it on, it was usually for a hundred. And sometimes more.

The perusal of the day's entries started the germ of hope in his breast. In his pocket was fifty dollars one of his collectors had brought in.

"H'mm," he whispered as he scanned the list of entries at Lincoln Fields, "so Pegasus is going today. Should be a cinch, from the form. And he'll pay about ten to one."

As he pulled a memo pad from a desk drawer, he reached for the gold pencil which was usually in a vest pocket. The pen was there but not its mate. Then he saw the broken half of the pencil he had taken from Benny.

He sharpened it to a fine point with a small pen knife and then wrote:

Harry:

Put this on Pegasus in the sixth at Lincoln Fields. Right on the schnozz, as usual.

Joe Lacey

He put the note and the fifty dollars into a blank envelope and after sealing it, called out:

"Tommy."

One of the two muscle-men in the outer office came in.

"Yeah, boss?"

"Take this down to Harry Moore's. And get there before the sixth goes at Lincoln Fields, understand?"

"Sure thing, boss," Tommy an-

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swered. And picking up the envelope, he left for Harry Moore's book, the largest in the Loop.

Joe Lacey, like all other horse players, was an optimist. Also a chicken fancier. As was evident from the eggs he hoped to collect from the roost he had just feathered.

"Yep, that five hundred will just about be right," he thought. "With collections tomorrow up to snuff, I'll get another five hundred and that will take care of Slim until next time, anyway."

HE HAD a two hour wait before the start of the sixth race, so he went down to the barber shop on the fifth floor of the building. Not for a shave or a haircut, but because the shop had a radio over which the race results were received.

Time passed swiftly. Then came the sixth race, a wide-open affair with eight horses running. Lacey sat, his ear almost to the radio, and waited with bated breath for the running of the race.

Pegasus didn't even get a call!

Some broken down hay-bag, Borrowed Time by name, took the race. He was such a long shot that only those people who close their eyes and stick a pin through the entry list could have picked him to win.

Joe Lacey, a little sadder but no wiser, went back to his office.

"Won't I ever learn?" he groaned softly, as he sat down at his desk again.

The door was flung open and Tommy burst into the room. The muscle-man's face held but one emotion—awe.

"Gee, boss, you sure pick 'em," he chortled, as he took a thin bundle of bills from his trouser pocket. He threw the bills on the desk, and while Lacey counted them, he continued:

"And was Harry sore. The only guy to pick that goat was you and you had half a C on him. Nice going, boss."

Lacey had counted the bills while Tommy was rhapsodising on Joe's luck. There were fifteen hundred-dollar bills there. Borrowed Time had paid the limit. Thirty to one.

But he had played Pegasus!

Something made Joe Lacey pick up the phone and call Harry Moore.

It was evident from Harry's voice that he didn't particularly care for any part of Lacey. After they had exchanged the usual amenities of a telephone call and Harry had remarked on Joe's luck, Joe said:

"Say, Harry. About that bet of mine: I thought I wrote——"

Harry didn't give him a chance to finish. He said sharply:

"Now listen, Joe. I got your note right here in front of me. Fifty bucks on Borrowed Time. So don't start telling me it was more."

"Are you sure, Harry?" Joe demanded.

"Well, if you don't believe me, come on over and look," Harry said.

"Yeah. I think I'll do that, Harry," Joe said, and hung up.

HARRY had the note on his desk, when Joe walked in. He was right too. The name of the horse was Borrowed Time. Something was wrong somewhere. But whatever it was, Joe Lacey was fifteen hundred dollars the richer for it.

The incident was still puzzling Joe when he walked into the restaurant where he was to meet Slim Masconi.

Slim was sitting in a small booth, near the door. His short, squat body took up almost all of the seat on his side of the table. His sullen, vicious eyes took in Lacey with a look of contempt.

"D'ja bring the dough?" were his first words to Lacey after Joe sat down

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across from him.

"I've got it, Slim."

"Well, drop it. It won't fly over to me."

Lacey tossed him ten of the one hundred dollar bills.

Slim didn't bother to count the bills. His face still mirrored his contempt as he said:

"Yuh know, Joe, you're a pretty smart guy. You've always been that. Except for one time."

Lacey, his face stolid, said:

"And you're never going to let me forget that one time, are you, Slim?"

There was a world of menace in Slim's smile as he replied:

"Don't ask silly questions. The cops in Cleveland would give their eye teeth to get hold of that goon supply contract you signed with our union. Slim smartened you up, didn't he? You don't sign nothing any more. You just supply the goons both ways. To the unions for what they need, and to the storekeeper for his protection. And Joe Lacey collects from everybody. I'm glad that I'm only a silent partner."

He laughed in Lacey's face when he finished his talk and got up to go. Joe could hear him laughing even after Slim left the restaurant.

"Someday I'm going to kill you, Slim," he promised silently as he wearily got to his feet.

HE WAS sitting in his office, several days later, when Harry Moore called him up.

"How's about giving me a chance to get even?" Harry wanted to know.

"Why, what's up?" Joe asked.

Harry said:

"The big fight's tomorrow: Morgan and Thomas. Odds are even and you can pick your man. I'll take any bet up to a thousand."

"O.K., Harry," Joe promised, "I'll see who I like and send one of my boys over with the dough."

The half-pencil which Lacey had used several days before still lay on the desk. Lacey opened his newspaper to the sport pages to see what the dope was on the coming fight. He noticed that the Randolph Street bookmakers held the fight an even bet. And from the fighters' previous records it looked like an even match. He decided to play a hunch. And picked Thomas.

He wrote another note to Harry; and, using the half-pencil again, wrote:

Harry:

Enclosed is five hundred on Thomas. Playing a hunch. Maybe this time you'll get lucky.

Joe Lacey.

The fight was scheduled for that very night and Joe decided to take it in. The Standing Room Only crowd was a testimonial to the popularity of the fighters. Joe saw, from his seat in the tenth row, that the two men were physically well matched. They were light-heavyweights; and Thomas, the man he had picked, was the taller of the two. And as the bell clanged for the opening of the fight, he proved to be the more scientific, also.

He had a beautiful left hand, which he used to keep Morgan off balance. For three rounds the fight was even. Then Thomas began to use his left as an offensive weapon. Morgan couldn't keep his face away from that slashing, stinging left hand. By the end of the eighth round, it was a foregone conclusion. For early in that round, Morgan, breaking all the rules of boxing technique, led with his right. Thomas had promptly given him the proper penalty. He had slid in under the pawing right hand and shot a straight left to Morgan's chin. Then, while Morgan was off balance, Thomas hooked his left to Morgan's jaw and

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crossed over with a haymaking right.

Morgan went down. And the crowd got up! Thomas' right had Morgan's number on it. But—Morgan got up. And went right down again. The rest of the round was devoted to Thomas' efforts to put Morgan away.

But Morgan managed to stick.

In the ninth round, Morgan got on his bike and stayed away from Thomas. But not in the tenth. That was the final round. Thomas was all set for the kill. He caught up with Morgan early in the round and from then on until the end it was a repetition of the eighth. The end came suddenly and dramatically. Morgan had gone down for the third time and Thomas was hopping up and down behind the referee, waiting to see if Morgan would come up. Morgan did, after taking an eight count; but just as he reached his feet, one foot slipped in a little of the blood which he had shed from the shellacking Thomas had dealt.

And just as he slipped, Thomas let go with the hardest punch of the night, a right hand, intended for Morgan's chin. Everyone in the stadium heard the explosive sound of bones breaking when that fist, backed by one hundred and seventy five pounds, caught Morgan on his—skull.

Morgan, too, heard that sound. And although he had absorbed a terrific amount of punishment, he knew that this was the only chance he had to win. Thomas, his face pale with pain, was backing up slightly when Morgan feinted first with a left, then with a right. Then he threw the left again . . . and the fight was over. They could have counted a hundred over Thomas' prostrate body.

TWO very bewildered men met at one of the exit gates of the stadium. Of the two, Joe Lacey was the more bewildered. For Harry Moore had, after they stepped into a cab, handed Joe one thousand dollars.

Joe sat there staring at the money in wondering silence while Harry said:

"Man, I wish I had your luck! Only a miracle saved Morgan; but do miracles happen for me? No. Not when Joe Lacey gives me a bet."

"But Harry—" Joe started to protest.

"I know, Joe," Harry broke in, "you didn't know what was going to happen and neither did anyone else. But Thomas won and so did you. And that's what I pay off on, the winner. Can I drop you anywhere, Joe?" he asked as Lacey maintained his silence.

"If you don't mind, Harry, drop me off at the office," Joe said . . .

Joe Lacey turned on the desk light and sat down. The stub of a pencil was still lying there where he had dropped it after writing the note. He picked it up and began to examine it. There was nothing mysterious about it. Just a plain pencil with an ordinary rubber eraser at one end, and a piece of slate at the other.

Joe put the pencil down with a feeling of reverence. The mystery was no longer a mystery, yet, paradoxically, was now a greater mystery than before.

Joe knew now that the pencil was the cause of his sudden good luck. For there wasn't the slightest doubt in his mind that the pencil was possessed of some mysterious power which made its writing change to bring good fortune to him.

He had to make one final test, however. Again he picked a horse, one Bolivar by name, and wrote it down on the memo pad. He put the piece of paper into the blank envelope again. Then he left his office for his bachelor apartment on the near North Side. He

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placed the envelope on his dresser, undressed and went to sleep.

When he got up in the morning, the first act of his awakening was to examine the note in the envelope. He was unconscious of his shaking hands. Or the trembling of his body. His eyes saw only the name that was written there. And the name wasn't Bolivar; it was Go Lightly, a horse with only a fair reputation—but only in the mud. On a dry track he ran an invariable last.

Joe rushed to the window. The sky was cloudless and the sun was already hot on his face. Joe groaned aloud. The note said Go Lightly. But here it was, clear and hot; and Go Lightly was running at Lincoln Fields in the first race. Joe made up his mind, but fast. The note said Go Lightly, and that was the horse he was going to play. By noon he had sent off another fifty to Harry Moore with instructions on what horse to put it, and an hour later he was in the barber shop waiting for the first race to start. The track announcer usually came on five minutes before post time but today he was late. When he did come on, it was to make an unusual announcement. The track's water main had burst and the opening race would be delayed five minutes until the water was drained off.

"This is unbelievable!" Joe said to himself. "The only kind of a track that goat can run on is a muddy one. So on a hot, clear day, Lincoln Fields has a muddy track!"

Go Lightly won by three lengths.

In the next two weeks Joe Lacey made a half million dollars. And gave three quarters of it to Slim Masconi.

It was only natural for Masconi to hear of Joe's amazing luck. For he moved in the same circles. But where Joe, due to the pencil, couldn't make a mistake, Masconi had no such luck. Whatever money he took from Joe was given right back to the tracks, bookies and gambling joints of the city. But he didn't care. Not as long as Joe remained lucky.

In the meantime, Joe was playing his luck all the way. He had given up his labor goon agency and devoted all his time to playing the horses and stock market. He still kept his office, however. All he had to do was choose a stock he wanted to put money on; write down the name of it at night and in the morning the note read whether it would advance or fall. What was more wonderful, the note would also tell how many points it would rise or fall. Joe Lacey couldn't lose, no sir! If only Slim Masconi were out of the picture.

JOE was at his desk again, one morning, when he noticed that the pencil was just a stub now.

"I never thought of that," he told himself as he looked at the pencil. "But it couldn't go on forever. The lead had to go sometime. Now if Benny only has another pencil like this, I'll still be riding high."

The thought of Benny brought something else to mind. Perhaps it wasn't the pencil which was lucky. Perhaps it was Benny who had something to do with it. He'd have to get in touch with Benny again, for since that day he had chased him out of the office, Benny never showed up again.

But just now the pencil had to perform a last trick. Joe Lacey had been thinking a lot of Slim Masconi the last few days and his thinking had not been in vain. He had evolved a little plan, which would eliminate Slim and get Slim to give up that incriminating contract.

He reached for the phone and dialed a number.

"Hello," Joe said, when he heard

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someone answer the ring, "is this the Ace High Messenger Service?"

On being assured that it was, Joe said:

"How many messenger boys do you have there? Twenty? Is that all? All right; send them all up here."

He gave his name and office address, and leaned back comfortably, awaited their coming. In ten minutes there was a knock on the door and twenty young boys came in.

"All right now, here is what I want you kids to do," Joe explained to them. "Go to every cigar store in the Loop and bring me a half dozen baseball pool tickets from each store. There are twenty of you, so you can do it in about half an hour. Each of you will get a fin when you're through, plus the agency cost. O.K. now, scram."

In half an hour Joe had three hundred and twenty pool tickets on his desk. He gave each of the messengers a five dollar bill and told them to return in an hour.

When they left he began to mark the names of eight winning teams on each ticket. The odds on getting all eight teams were hundred to one. Joe was going to put a dollar on each ticket. It looked as though Joe was going to win three hundred and twenty thousand dollars. But when he wrote the name of the bettor, it wasn't Joe Lacey's. It was Slim Masconi.

When he was through he was smiling broadly. There was nothing pleasant about the smile, however. He sat back and thought of what was going to happen.

"Now this is going to be good. Ace Gordon's syndicate runs baseball pools in this town. And Slim—" Joe laughed aloud at the thought—"used to work with Ace in Cleveland. So Slim pulled a fast one on Ace and Ace swore he'd get even. Late this afternoon Ace is going to discover that someone by the name of Slim Masconi has the top winning combinations on three hundred and twenty one-dollar tickets and stands to take the syndicate for three hundred and twenty G's. Ace won't like that! But when he reads the little note I'm going to send him, the only one who won't like it will be Slim Masconi!"

The messengers returned and Joe distributed the tickets to them with a dollar bill for each ticket. Then calling one of them to the side he said:

"When you're through doing that, son, I want you to go down to Clark and Van Buren. On the corner you'll find an old mooch called Benny the Pencil. If he isn't there, ask the traffic cop where he is. He'll tell you. Well, when you find him, bring him back with you."

THE messengers left again and Joe sat down to await Benny's arrival. Suddenly he was no longer relaxed and comfortable. Things were coming to a climax for him and he couldn't sit still. He paced about the office as though it were a barred cage. He had to wait a full hour before the messenger returned with Benny.

"Well, Benny," Joe greeted him with a broad smile, "where you been? I've been running short on pencils. Thought you might have got lost."

"Who—me?" Benny asked suspiciously. "Naw. Clark and Van Buren's my spot. I don't move much."

"Say, Benny." Joe became serious. "You got any more pencils like this one?"

He showed him the stub. Benny looked at it, then looked up at Joe and said:

"Yeah, I think so. But why like this?"

"Well, Benny," Joe said, smiling

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anew, "that pencil brought me luck and I'd like to get another just like it."

"That pencil didn't bring you luck, Joe. It was me. Remember the day I was here and you was on the phone. Well, I saw that things was tough when you only dropped a nickel, so I did something I never did before. I wished good luck on you Joe. I swear it."

It was the longest spiel of Benny's career—and the best.

"So that was it, Benny? You wished me luck?" Joe said. "Well, here's ten bucks for another of those lucky pencils and lucky wishes. How do you like that?"

Benny held the ten dollar bill reverently. He hadn't thought his spiel would be worth that much. But the evidence was in his hand.

"Thanks, Joe," he said at last. "An' I hope the pencil writes nothin' but good for yuh."

Joe had asked two of the messenger boys to remain. When Benny left, Joe sat down at his desk to compose a letter, a very important letter. The pencil stub was so small, now, that he was barely able to write with it. In fact, all he could get out of it was the heading to the letter: Ace.

He threw the stub away in disgust and after sharpening the pencil Benny had recently given him, started the body of the letter: "The guy who bet——" Then the pencil point broke. He sharpened it anew and began again. And again the point broke. After sharpening it for the sixth time, Joe hurled the pencil from him in disgust.

Now what to do? He had no other pencil and he could not use pen and ink because the pencil had become too completely associated in his mind with the luck which had come to him. His eyes roamed over the desk top and lit upon the other half of the first pencil Benny had given him. It had lain there all this time. He lost very little time in putting a point on it. And when he began the body of the letter, there was no breaking point this time. The letter read thus:

Ace:

The guy who bet all those winning combinations, today, will be talking to a pencil-selling bum at Clark and Van Buren at six o'clock this evening. It'd be kind of tough if he couldn't collect that three hundred and twenty grand; but it'd be tougher if you had to pay it out. Understand?

A Friend

JOE looked at the letter, satisfaction bright in his eyes. As far as he was concerned the letter was a masterpiece of skulduggery. He sealed it, called in one of the messengers and gave him the syndicate's address, saying:

"Now get this: The only guy you're to give this to is Ace Gordon himself. Hand it to him and scram. There won't be any answer and I don't want him to ask you any questions. Get it?"

The boy nodded his head, and left.

Then Joe started another letter. This one read:

Slim:

I have to leave town for a few days. But if you'll be at Clark and Van Buren tonight at six o'clock, I'll leave five grand with that bum, on the corner, who peddles those pencils. Be there at six sharp because that's the only time you can find him there. Sorry I couldn't make it, but will see you in a few days. The money will be in an envelope.

Joe

This letter he gave to the other mes-

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senger, after telling him Slim's address.

"And if he isn't in, leave it with the desk clerk. He'll be back in time."

It was now about three o'clock in the afternoon. Joe knew where Benny was usually to be found. He was sorry that he hadn't thought of asking Benny to stay when the messenger brought him. But it didn't matter very much as long as Benny was on the corner at six o'clock.

Joe knew where to look. In front of Joe's Mansion. He took Benny aside and said, as he gave him ten dollars:

"Here's a sawbuck for you, Benny. It'll be the easiest money you ever made in your life. All you have to do is this: At six o'clock tonight I want you to be on the corner of Clark and Van Buren with your tin cup full of pencils. Stand near the shoe store. At six o'clock, some guy is going to walk up to you and ask for an envelope. Stall him for a few minutes and that's all you'll have to do. Got it, Benny?"

Benny nodded his head solemnly. He got it.

Joe took the third envelope he had prepared in his office and gave it to Benny. After Benny left, Joe sat in the Manhattan Tea Room for a while. Then, as the time passed too slowly that way, he decided to take in a newsreel for an hour. But even there his mind kept picturing the inevitable consequences his letters would bring.

He came back to the Manhattan Tea Room. It was just a few minutes before five o'clock. He looked toward the corner where Benny, at this hour, was usually to be seen. But the rush hour had just begun and he could not see Benny in the crush of people.

"This is a hell of a time for that mooch to take a powder," Joe thought angrily.

He pushed through the doors of the Manhattan Tea Room and walked to the corner. Benny was there. He walked up to him and said:

"Geez, I thought you took a powder."

"Who, me? After you give me a sawbuck, Joe?" Benny asked in surprise. "Why, I'd stay here till tomorrow for that ten," he concluded.

It was just five o'clock.

A Ford sedan drove by, passed Finnegan at his post and slowly drew abreast of Benny and Joe. A hand, holding a gun, was suddenly thrust through one of its open windows.

Benny, who happened to be facing the car saw the gun. Joe looked at Benny and caught the look of terror that came on his face. Some sixth sense told him what was about to happen—but told him too late. Even before he was able to turn to run, the gun sang a song of death for him. He fell, a blue-edged hole in his head, at Benny's feet.

But another person saw the hand with its lethal weapon: Finnegan. His answering shot came too late to save Joe; but a short wiry man fell out of the car. The driver didn't wait for any more shooting. He took it on high. Not that the fallen gunman needed anything. He was as dead as Joe.

Finnegan called the meat-wagon; then went over to the dead killer. He pawed through his pockets to see what he could find in the way of identification. Among the items brought to light, was a strange letter. It read:

Ace:

The guy who bet all those winning combinations, today, will be talking to a pencil-selling bum at Clark and Van Buren at FIVE O'CLOCK *this evening. It'd be kind of tough if he couldn't collect that three hundred and twenty grand; but it'd be tougher if you had to pay it out. Understand?*

A Friend

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Finnegan couldn't make head or tails of it but he knew the homicide men would take care of that.

It was several hours later that Benny realized no one had come to ask for the envelope Joe had given him to deliver.

"Well, it won't make no never mind now," he said philosophically. He opened the envelope and read the note it contained. The note read:

Slim:

Sorry it had to happen this way. But then luck has to change for all of us, doesn't it? Only you won't be here to see it change.

★ DESERT VICTORY ★

IT WAS in the great Libyan desert that the British started to push Rommel back to his eventual defeat and give Hitler one of his severest headaches of the war.

But in the desert of Southern Nevada, another battle has been fought and won that will add its share to the downfall of Germanism.

This battle was a battle of production and the final victory came when the largest magnesium plant in the world went into production.

This huge plant owned by Basic Magnesium, Inc., is the result of four things: the energy produced by Boulder Dam located fifteen miles away, the water stored up by the dam, the huge deposits of magnesium ore, and American ingenuity and will to win the war at all costs.

It isn't easy to build a plant in the middle of a desert where only a short time ago there was no water, no power, and very few people. And once the plant is built, you can't run it without workers who will come only if you can provide them with the necessities and a few of the luxuries of life. And so the building of a plant that cost over $100,000,000 and into which was poured 50,000 tons of structural steel so vital to our war effort was only the first step.

The more important step was the erection of 1000 demountable homes to form a model village for the workers with families. Another camp was erected to provide homes for the 6,000 single men working at the plant. In addition, trailer camps and motor courts soon sprang up and those who so desired could live in Las Vegas which was only 15 miles away and commute each day.

To see that the children got their reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, a school from kindergarten through high school was built. A large, modern hospital takes care of the sick and a large restaurant puts out 25,000 meals a day.

But more than workers had to be brought into the plant. Huge power lines were erected over the mountains to carry electricity from Boulder Dam. An enormous pipe line was built to carry water from Lake Meade into the two water reservoirs built to store it. They even built a railroad as well as a road to bring in supplies and take out the magnesium. All of this adds up to the staggering fact that when this one plant hits its peak, it alone will produce thirty times as much magnesium as was produced by the whole world just seven short years ago. This plant, while the largest, is only one of many plants in operation.

Magnesium is a silvery white metal that possesses a high lustre. It is both malleable and ductile and has a high melting and boiling point. The first record of magnesium was in 1695 when N. Grew isolated magnesium sulphate now known as "epsom salts." Davy, the great British chemist, announced in 1808 that magnesia was the oxide of a metal, but he was unable to isolate it. It was not until the end of the 19th century that magnesium was obtained in its pure form.

It is the eighth most abundant element, but so little of it was obtained in a free state that few of its potentialities were discovered.

But today Basic Magnesium, Inc., has changed the entire picture. Today we are using magnesium to produce tracer bullets, flares and incendiary bombs. Because it is so light, magnesium is used to produce alloys from which are made airplanes, gas tanks, engines, and many other items.

The process used to produce magnesium is not very complicated. The magnesium oxide is mined in the Nevada desert valley and carried to the plant. Here it is ground, mixed with coal, salt and some other substances and shaped into small balls. These balls then go into kilns where all water is removed. Then they are melted in a large round furnace and pure chlorine gas is forced into the molten mass. By this step the magnesium oxide is changed into magnesium chloride, which is run off into electrolytic cells. By means of an electrical current, the pure magnesium is separated from the chlorine.

To show that money is no object, when they found that copper was not available to carry the current through the magnesium chloride, the engineers decided to use silver. The silver used cost over $18,000,000 but it is helping to save American lives and well worth it. Moreover, the silver is not used up and once copper is no longer needed to win the war, it will be used to replace the silver. Even after the war, the demand for magnesium will be great and the output of Basic Magnesium, Inc., will be geared to peacetime economy instead of turning out wartime tools.

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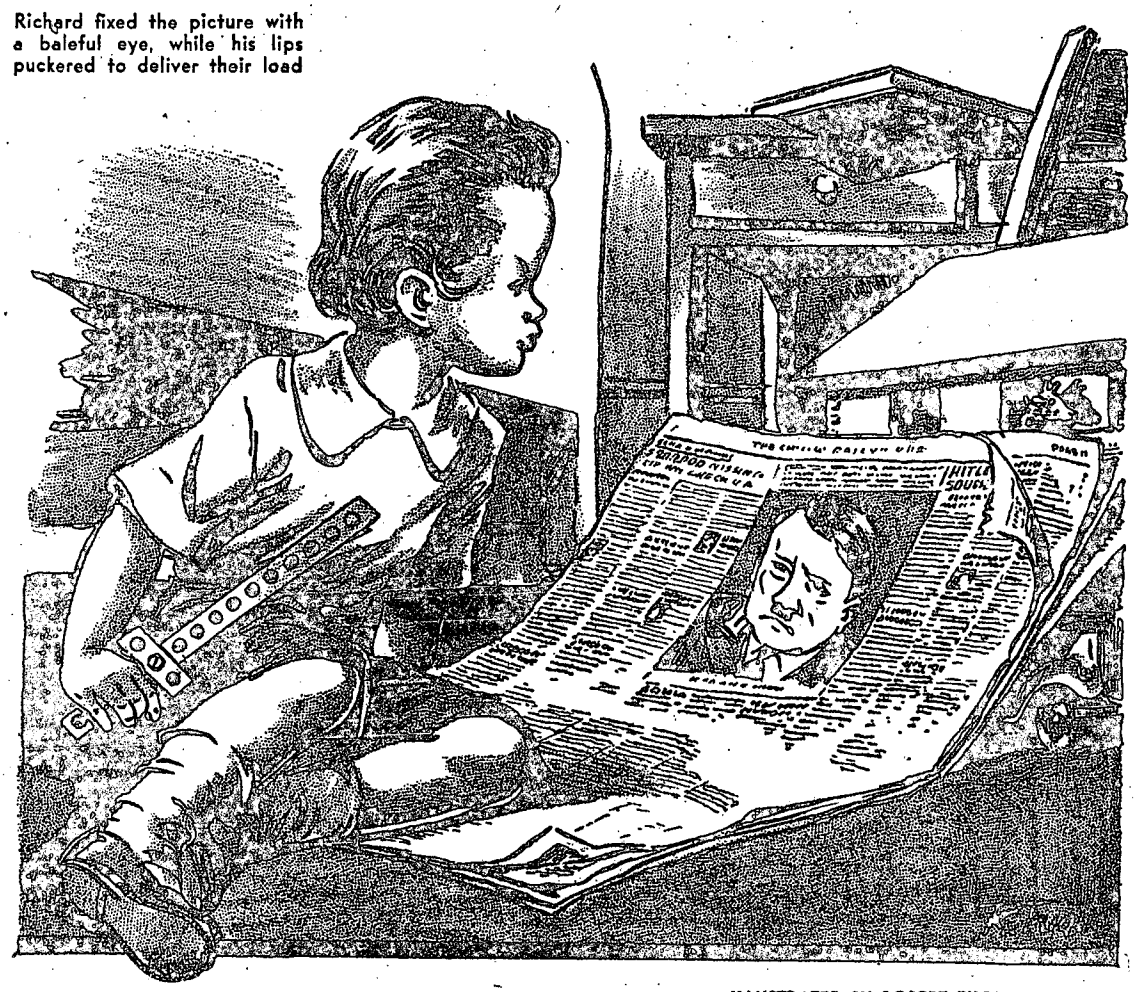
HITLER'S RIGHT EYE

Richard fixed the picture with a baleful eye, while his lips puckered to deliver their load



ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT FUQUA

By LEE FRANCIS

All Richard knew about Hitler was what his father had said: the world's worst man. So he decided on a way to fix der Fuehrer—but good!

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RICHARD STANTON, JR., wriggled uncomfortably on the davenport, trying to turn the troublesome newspaper until he could study the picture section upside down as it should be. The folds would not cooperate, resulting in a wrinkled mess that could be seen well from no angle. Finally he lost his patience. His nose wrinkled distastefully.

"Darn old paper! You be good or I'll spit all over you."

The threat resulted in immediate repercussions from his mother.

"Richard!" Madge Stanton, her face hidden behind a magazine, tried hard not to smile. "How many times have I told you——?"

Richard Stanton, Jr. wadded the entire sports-section into a large ball, let it fall to the carpet, and slid carefully to the floor.

"I is gonna go hunt dwagons. They is in my bedwoom."

At the opposite end of the living room, Bill Stanton, Sr., emerged momentarily from behind the front page, stared over his glasses, and smiled at his wife. Stanton had that comfortable, middle-aged look that comes with slightly gray hair and long hours of work in an office. He sometimes wished *he* could hunt "dwagons" with his son. The imagination of a four-year-old was as refreshing as it was startling.

This time, however, drastic measures were called for. He scowled, carefully tightening his facial muscles until every pretense of a smile was gone.

"Richard! Come here!"

Dickie Stanton was already out of the room, on his way to slay a dwagon. He returned slowly, one hand held tightly over the seat of his pants. He went to his father with head hanging.

"Yes, Daddy." The greeting was as sweet as an angel's. Dickie knew the power of the swinging arm. He had no intention of inviting an onslaught. Mommy didn't hurt much; but Daddy kept hitting the same place until it turned red. "Did I do somethin'?"

Stanton waited until his son was close, reached out and gripped small shoulders with both hands.

"How many times have we told you not to use nasty words, young man?"

"You mean dwagons? Is they nasty, Daddy?"

Dickie looked up with round, blue eyes, and an expression of innocence that had been rehearsed through four hard years of living.

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"I mean, what you said about that newspaper," Stanton said sternly. "If I hear you use the word 'spit' again, I'll——"

Dickie tried to draw away, anxious to be on with a dwagon hunt.

"*You* say spit, Daddy," he protested. That was always a good way out. "Only a little while ago you say 'spit' in Hitler's face."

Richard Stanton turned a trifle red. He released Dickie.

"Grownups can say lots of things children shouldn't," he explained hurriedly. "When you grow up——"

"When I grow up, can I say spi——?"

A hurried hand clamped over his mouth. Dickie struggled for a minute, forgot the word he was trying to say, and relaxed. The hand was withdrawn.

"Go hunt dragons," his father commanded shortly; and as his offspring hurriedly followed these instructions, he said in an embarrassed voice:

"Madge, sometimes I don't know what we'll do with that brat."

From the other room Dickie started to shout at the top of his high, uncontrolled voice.

"I is a bwat. I is a bwat."

"Shut up," Stanton howled. "By the great God, I'll——"

"*Stop* that," Madge Stanton said sharply. "That's *exactly* how he *learns* all those words."

Silence settled uncomfortably over the room for several minutes. From the bedroom came occasional sounds, like "Giddap, horsey," and "Take that, you nasty old dwagon."

Richard Stanton continued to read the paper peacefully. The offspring was forgotten.

IN THE safety of his own room, Dickie had a swell dwagon hunt. He managed to corner a number of the fire-spitting, green-scaled monsters. They tried to hide under his bed, and he went after them with a tinker-toy that he had cunningly shaped into a sword. The sword had keen, razor-like edges, and Dickie proceeded to make steaks out of the dwagons.

After they were all slaughtered, no other sport presented itself. Dickie sat quietly under the bed. He knew it was getting very late, and if he wasn't quiet, Mommy would put him to bed.

Dickie hated bed. He hated it with every little fierce bone in his body. Bed wasn't any fun at all. When he grew up beds were going to be thrown away. People would "stay up" all the time. There were going to be thousands of dwagons and he'd spend all his time hunting them.

Dickie wasn't sure that he wouldn't let the dwagons eat Daddy before he killed them. Daddy was growing troublesome. It was Daddy who said "spit on Hitler," but he wouldn't let Dickie say spit. He said "damn" and "shut up" and any number of swell words; but Dickie wasn't supposed to say any of them.

Now, take spitting in Hitler's face, for example. Dickie didn't know much about Hitler. He knew that Hitler was the leader of all the Germans. Dickie hated Germans because all the older boys went around shooting at them with wooden guns.

Dickie had a gun too, but he didn't dare shoot anything tonight. That would make a lot of noise and remind Mommy that he wasn't in bed yet.

It *would* be kinda fun, he thought, to spit in Hitler's face. Dickie remembered just what made Daddy say it. Daddy had been reading the paper, and he opened a page and said:

"Every time I look at this ugly mug, I want to spit on it."

Mom said:

"Shhhh!"

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It was all very secret, and Dickie wasn't supposed to hear it. Daddy held the page for Mommy to see, and Mommy said:

"Hitler again. There should be a law against even printing his *picture*."

Daddy sighed.

"Keeps us aware that he's still alive," he said. "I'll be glad when someone puts a bullet through his head."

Dickie wondered if he could shoot a *real* gun. That would be more fun than spitting.

He decided to get the picture of Hitler and spit on it, just to find out what would happen. Probably Mommy would catch him, and he'd have to kick and squeal, and end up by going to bed.

It was worth a try. Dickie adopted commando tactics, crept carefully around the corner into the hall, and crawled slowly toward the front room. When a paper rustled suddenly, Dicky froze, not moving a muscle until Daddy's face was deep in the paper again. Then he wriggled slowly ahead.

He reached the place behind Daddy's chair where the discarded sheet of newspaper had been tossed. With it held firmly in his hand he backed away and safely reached his bedroom.

He studied Hitler's picture for a long time. If he had been able to read all the words under it, he would have known that: "Hitler, his cause lost, has retreated into the hills, a hunted man. English and American sharp-shooters have made more or less of a game of finding him. Every nation had placed a price on this man's head. Who will be the first to place a bullet through his skull?"

But Dickie couldn't read it, and he wasn't interested anyhow. He placed the picture on the floor and started to roll saliva on his tongue. He had a nice big blob of it ready to let go.

"Dickie?" His mother's voice was sharp, questioning. "Heavens, I completely forgot to put that boy to bed."

Dickie grew tense. He heard her footsteps in the hall. His mouth was full of saliva now. He aimed at Hitler's right eye and let go. The shot was excellent. The hit was direct.

Dickie rolled over contentedly on his back and waited as his mother's footsteps approached.

AT THAT identical moment, Adolph Hitler crouched in the water-soaked brush, high in the mountains near his former retreat. Hitler was facing a last opportunity for escape.

He was on his knees, a dejected animal-like figure, eyes shining like a cornered rodent, drenched to the skin. His weapon, a powerful deer rifle presented to him years before by the hunter, Goering, lay ready across his knees.

A sound came from below him in the small gulley. Hitler's body tensed. The rifle came up. Someone was there, stalking him, ready to kill. He had been stalked thus for days, never alone, never safe.

He waited. The movement came again, this time bringing a man into sight from beyond the edge of the gulley. Hitler's rifle was steady. The man below carried a telescopic rifle. He was brown and gaunt from days of travel in the forest.

Hitler's rifle was aimed, but the rain troubled him. It ran down his face and dripped on his legs. He sighted carefully, his finger closing about the trigger. The figure in the gulley was outlined perfectly.

"Gott un Himmel!"

His arm had touched a wet branch and a blob of water fell from it, hitting Adolph Hitler squarely in the right eye. Startled, his nerves worn to a thin edge,

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he cried aloud with surprise and anger.

The man in the gulley dropped quickly, turned, sighted into the brush and fired three shots in quick succession.

There was no movement—no sound after that. The paperhanger was a scrawny, half-starved corpse when they found him the following morning.

DICKIE STANTON, JR., the little boy who had spit in Hitler's eye, slept the sleep of the avenged. He dreamed that Hitler was going to shoot a "dwagon," but he, Dickie, spit in Hitler's eye and spoiled his aim.

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Galen

This amazing physician of ancient Greece, was two thousand years ahead of his time. Modern surgery owes much to him.

GALEN, the Greek physician, was born in 130 A.D., in Perganum, the capital of Mysia, an ancient province in the northwestern corner of Asia Minor, a city renowned for its magnificent library, the creation of the Attalid Kings. He is sometimes wrongly spoken of as Claudius Galen, but the cognomen Claudius has no authenticity and is a result of a misunderstanding on the part of Renaissance scholars.

From his earliest years Galen was familiar with the Platonic, Peripatetic, Stoic and Epicurean schools of thought. He began the study of medicine in 146, and two years later went to Smyrna to attend the lectures of Pelops, a celebrated physician. In search of knowledge he roamed through Greece, Cilicia, Phoenicia, Palestine, Crete, Cyprus and finally visited the famous medical school at Alexandria.

Settling at Rome in 164, Galen became acquainted with some of the highest officers of the state, among them the consul Boethus, Severus the future emperor, and the uncle of Lucius. Many of these eminent people attended his lectures and demonstrations. Galen used an unsparing pen against medical sects, the methodists, dogmatists, pneumatists and empirics, then flourishing in Rome, and thus provoked the hostility of his professional brethren. He belonged to no particular school, though in philosophy he favoured Aristotelianism.

When he was thirty-eight years old, he returned to Mysia, but he had hardly settled down to the practice of his profession when he was recalled by the emperor Marcus Aurelius for service in the Germanic Wars. But on arrival at the camp of the army he found that a pestilence had broken out there, and that the emperor had started on the return journey to Rome where he followed them. Little is known of the rest of his life. Apparently he was in Rome during the fire of 191, when many of his works were burned, and he was still lecturing in the reign of Pertinax. It is generally believed that he died in Sicily in A.D. 200.

Galen was a student and a voluminous writer. He was the author of some 500 treatises written in clear Attic Greek. There are still in existence 83 documents of his that are known to be genuine, besides more than 400 others, the authenticity of which is questionable, but which are preserved for what they may be worth in the collection of his writings. Very few of them have any value beyond that of ancient curiosities, for in his time, and for centuries after it, the medical art was in no sense a science. But Galen was also an anatomist of unusual ability and brilliancy for his day, and made one memorable discovery for which he has won immortal credit. This was, that the brain was the organ of thought.

Up to his time various opinions had been held as to the organ in the human body which was the seat of the mind. For instance, the word brain, or any word that might be thought to refer to that organ, is not to be found in the Bible or in any ancient literature. Among the Babylonians the liver was regarded as the thought center. With the Hellenes the heart was considered the home of the soul, and the kidneys that of the mind, while sentiment and the emotions were supposed to reside in the bowels. "Bowels of compassion." In Plato's time the brain, though well known as a separate bodily organ, was regarded as an extension, in the shape of a gland, of the marrow of the bones. And while he—for no reason that can be deduced from his writings—called it the seat of the soul, he exhibited no conception of it as the seat of thought. Aristotle later ridiculed the Pla-

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tonic view, which certainly was nonsense, and said that the brain was simply a gland set at the top of the body, for the purpose of keeping the blood from acquiring too high a temperature, in other words, simply a cooling gland. It is true that one Alcmaeon, a Greek of Italian birth, who lived in the 6th century B.C., and who was recognized locally as a physician of ability for his time, had definitely taught that the brain was the seat of thought. But his opinion carried no weight with the philosophers, and was quickly forgotten. It required a man of the experimental habits and international renown of Galen, to overthrow the childish speculation of his day on the subject. Accordingly, when, in about the year A.D. 160, he announced his discovery in a monograph entitled *De Anatomicis Administrationibus,* and elaborated it in a second one under the title of *De Usa Partium Corporis Humani,* his conclusions were at once accepted, and have never since been questioned. In fact, not until Harvey, in 1628, published his work on the circulation of the blood, did man begin to know much about the temple in which his mind and personality made their dwelling place.

Galen may be regarded as the founder of experimental physiology, and after Hippocrates, as the most distinguished physician of antiquity. To Hippocrates he acknowledges his deep obligations in practical medicine, and he is equally frank about his indebtedness to Alexandrian anatomists.

Galen's anatomical investigations were unrivalled in antiquity for their fullness and accuracy. He was an indefatigable dissector, describing mainly what he actually saw. He dissected apes and lower animals, though much that is relevant to the human body is incorporated in his works. As a specimen of his accuracy it may be mentioned that he recognised the lacteal vessels, and described the ducts of the lingual and submaxillary glands, though of their function he was unaware. Many structures, by which the names of 16th and 17th century anatomists, eponymously linger, were observed by Galen such as the aqueduct of Sylvius and the foramen ovale known as le trou Botal. The mode of closure of the latter Galen describes in language hardly since excelled.

Galen's physiological investigations were revolutionary. He knew of insensible perspiration, he ligatured the recurrent laryngeal nerve, he performed section of the spinal cord at various levels and observed the resulting sensory and motor disturbances and incontinence. He correctly interpreted the effect of cutting above the origin of the phrenic nerve. He described the heart with its three layers of fibres, which he hesitated to call muscle. The reasons for his reluctance are greatly to his credit. Thus, firstly, he noted that the cardiac substance presented characteristics different from those of ordinary muscle, as, for instance, in that its action was independent of volition, and, secondly, he recorded that section of its nerve supply was not followed by cessation of its activities. The valves of the heart are accurately described by him, and it is probably that he knew of the anastomosis of the vessels. One of his greatest contributions was the demonstration that the arteries contain blood, and not air as the Alexandrian school had taught for over four hundred years.

Apart from his medical work Galen occupies a position of considerable interest in the history of both religion and philosophy. He was a firm believer in God as the supreme creator of the universe in all its parts. He had set himself to prove that the bodily organs are in such perfect relation to the functions to which they minister that it is impossible to imagine any better arrangement. Thus, following the Aristotelian principle that Nature makes naught in vain, he develops the problem of final causes along definite lines. These lines amount to determinism with God as determiner. The peculiar feature of Galen's doctrine, however, is neither his determinism nor his monotheism, both of which were familiar to the thinkers of the day, but his extraordinary claim that God's purposes could be elicited in great detail from the examination of his works. This comes out most strikingly, perhaps, in his famous description of the hand, contained in his treatise *On the Uses of the Parts of the Body of Man.*

In several places in his works Galen mentions both Judaism and Christianity, though without much respect. In the great anatomical work under discussion he explains that in his belief God always works by law, and that it is just for this reason that natural law reveals him, and he adds that "in this matter our view . . . differs from that of Moses." It seems very probable that he had read some books of the Bible. His position can thus be summed up as intermediate between Stoicism and Christianity. On the one hand he accepted the natural law of the Stoic philosophy, but rejected its astrological corollary. On the other hand he accepted the divine guide and architect of the universe which corresponded to the Christian scheme, but rejected all idea of miracle.

Galen is held to have had a certain influence on the development of logic. He was, however, simply purveying the ordinary Peripatetic doctrines of his day. Nevertheless he is of some importance as the carrier or transmitter of these doctrines by reason of the avidity with which his medical works were read during the middle ages. He is thus in some sense responsible for both scholastic methods and scholastic philosophy.

Galen's monotheism no doubt contributed to his popularity in the ages that followed him. However, nearly all writings were lost to western Europe after the break-up of the Roman empire. They were, however, translated into Arabic and about the 11th century the *Methodus Medendi,* and the *Ars Parva* or so-called *Microtegni,* were recovered in Latin versions from Arabic sources. The 15th century saw the effective completion of the Galenic canon in Greek by humanist scholars. Latin translations were studied in the medical schools until the dawn of the 19th century.

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Lips parted in wonder, Louise watched the tiny chessmen make their own moves

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MAN FROM THE MAGIC RIVER

BY DON WILCOX

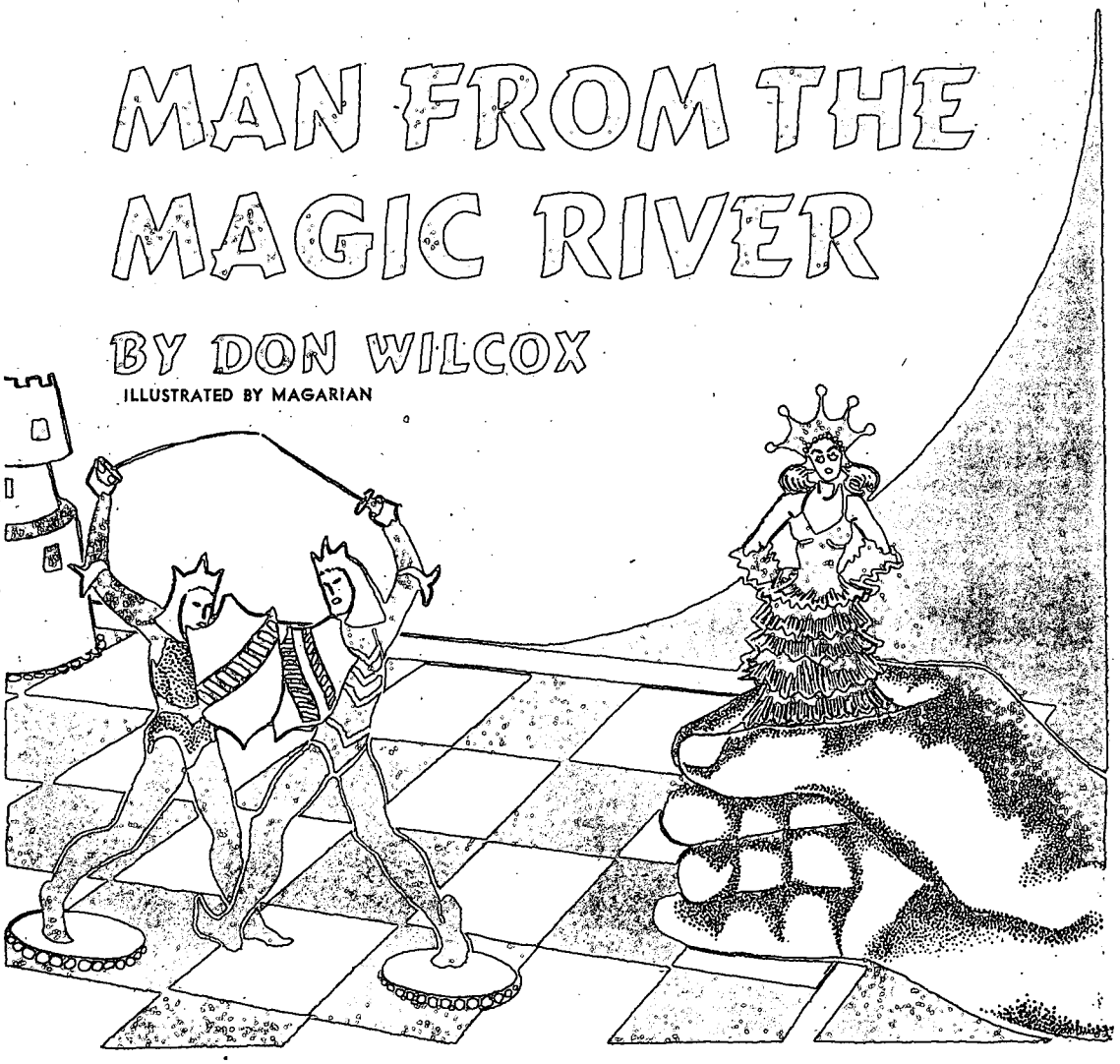
ILLUSTRATED BY MAGARIAN

LOUISE WILMOTT was walking alone through the garden when the strange meeting occurred. It was nearly midnight. The moon was full, showering a soft, white light through the rows of graceful poplars. The night was warm. There was no dew, and the acres of lawn stretched away past arches of climbing roses and clumps of shrubbery.

Louise was breathing in the fragrance and thrilling to that free-spirited feeling of being far away from everyone—reporters and cameramen and Washington officials and women's uplift committees. Here was complete peace and tranquillity. Until this hour of arriving in this far-off lakeside country she had almost forgotten that such things could be.

Suddenly her easy stride came to a stop. She was startled by the movement of a dark object among the shadows only a few yards to her right.

The object had been lying in a horizontal position and at first glimpse had reminded her of a fallen scarecrow. But as it drew its knees up and bent forward to catch them with black-gloved hands, Louise knew the strange



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apparition must be a man.

As the figure rose to his feet and strode slowly toward her path, Louise saw that his face was concealed by a mask.

"Good evening," he said. His voice was deep, like an echo out of a well.

Louise caught her breath. The mask he wore glittered with a row of bright green points of light across the forehead, like real emeralds scintillant in the moonlight. The man's face was lost under the loose sack of black silk. A face that cannot be seen is a face to be feared, Louise thought. The eyes were bright black beads within deep shadows. They were exceedingly alert, for a man who might have been sleeping under the stars, but Louise could not tell if they were smiling.

She yielded to an impulse to change her course. Abruptly she left the gravel path and started off across the patch of lawn.

The phantom of silk and jewels did not choose to be ignored. He crossed the gravel path with an unhurried stride.

"Good evening, miss," he repeated. His footsteps swished through the grass, coming closer. As she passed a row of garden sage his shadow crossed hers.

"Good evening," he said for the third time. "Aren't you lost in this garden, miss? You're a half mile from the house. You might not be safe."

She stopped and looked up at him. He was quite tall, and his broad shoulders, his high head and his wide, fan-shaped cap with the emerald band gave him the aspect of towering above her, a weird symbol of doom.

"Why are you following me?" Louise asked, trying hard not to seem frightened.

"Do let me show you around. This garden is quite large. You might get lost."

"What are you doing here?"

"Until you came along I was simply lying on the grass watching the skies, thinking what a beautiful moon—what a beautiful world——"

"It is beautiful," Louise said, somewhat breathlessly.

He nodded his head gently two or three times, and she guessed he might be smiling and saying to himself, "So you are going to see things my way!" What he did say was simply, "Beautiful!"

"Now please go back to your observation post," Louise said. "You're missing out on the moon and stars."

"But you are so much more beautiful. Do you come here often?"

LOUISE WILMOTT might have answered that, although she had never been here before, she had become the owner of this property through an inheritance.

Furthermore, she might have stated that persons who could not explain their presence here could be arrested for trespassing.

She fought down the impulse to give angry orders, though she would have been within her rights.

Instead, she said, "Do you have to wear black? Do you have to blot out my moonlight and roses with a shroud and a mask?"

The emerald-capped phantom gave a low laugh.

"Your moonlight? Your roses?"

"Very well, they *are* my roses."

"Then you are the owner—the very famous Miss Wilmott. I am honored." He gave a deep bow. The fan-shaped cap stirred a breeze against her face. The emerald band flashed. Then he stood very tall and straight again, and much too dignified.

"Since you insist upon talking with me, wouldn't it be courteous for you

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to remove your mask?" Louise suggested.

"That I cannot do," said the dark phantom. "But I must talk with you. I have a request to make. It will be to your advantage—— But come. Here's a place for us to sit."

"A park bench, I suppose?"

"No, a marble table—a chess table, if you please. I often engage myself in games through the night. The chessmen are jeweled. They catch the light of the farthest star. There. Won't you sit down? You are quite an expert at chess, I've heard."

Louise asked herself how he knew that. In fact, she suddenly asked herself a hundred questions.

Who was he? Had he known that she, the nation's famed "Miss Citizen" was coming here tonight? Did he know that she had longed for many years to see this lonesome old lakeside estate that her aunt had left to her? That she had decided only a few days ago to suspend the political career she had followed in her three years since college, to while away a few lazy months here in the country?

Less than an hour ago, Louise had arrived here with her chauffeur. Her secretary and companion, Darlene Donovan, would come after the office details were cared for.

Upon arriving, Louise had been overwhelmed by the beauty of the place—the lazy slapping of waters against the shore, the wide slope of lawn, the great rambling old house, the massive lines of its roofs and porches catching the white light of the summer moon.

Brenda, the fat, good-humored, crinkly-eyed old cook, had given Louise a glad welcome and had led her straight through the spacious hall, past the oaken staircases, to farther doors with the big colored squares of glass. There Louise had glimpsed an expanse of garden that stretched endlessly into the moonlit mists.

"I'll have to breathe in some of that garden magic before I can believe it's real," Louise had said.

"Don't you want a bite to eat first?" Brenda had suggested. "Don't you want to meet Mr. White, the scientist that your aunt left in charge of things here? He's up in his room, asleep over a book, most likely."

Louise had hesitated. She had been curious to know what this Mr. Theodore White would be like.

"Is he young and handsome, Brenda?" Louise asked, smiling.

"He's a spring chicken compared to me. But I'm all of sixty-five, child. I guess he's anyway fifty. His hair is just as white as his name, and so are his chin whiskers."

"I'll go on to the garden," Louise had said. "You have to take magic beauty like this when it comes. I'll see Mr. White later."

"And all this mail—these letters from scientists all over the world——"

"Later, Brenda."

AND now Louise Wilmott found herself looking across a moonlit marble chess-table into the masked eyes of a tall young man—his voice, for all its depths, was certainly young—and he was talking in riddles.

What a curious mixture his costume was—tattered old black silks and glittering precious stones. There were emeralds in his belt, rubies in his black gloves. As he talked he gestured expressively with his broad hands. Ragged strips of black silk fluttered from his wrists. He was hardly a scarecrow, Louise thought, but rather some hitherto unknown ghost that had sprung from the blackest waters of a moonlit lily pool. The conceit of a lazy bullfrog was in his low, easy voice.

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But presently his words struck Louise dumb with amazement.

"Yes, I quite agree with you," he was saying. "There's nothing so peaceful as a moonlit garden. Do you know where to find a doctor?"

"A doctor?"

"One that can remove bullets," said the man with the emerald mask. "One that can handle an emergency."

"I know of one at a village a hundred miles from here. We could get him yet tonight. My chauffeur is here."

"Tomorrow will be soon enough," said the young man calmly. "I can depend on you?"

"Of course, if he's needed. But such things mustn't wait. I'll have the chauffeur go at once."

The masked man arose slowly. "Tomorrow."

Louise gasped. "But if someone has been shot——"

"Please don't excite yourself."

"Who was it? When did it happen?"

"It hasn't happened yet," said the man, passing his gloved fingers lightly over his headband. "There'll be several bullets. You'd better invite the doctor out for a week. Good evening."

He bowed deeply and strode off into the mists of the night.

CHAPTER II

Crash!

LOUISE stood for a long time, completely puzzled over the strange encounter. She might have believed it only a fancy of her carefree mind, but at her fingertips were the smooth, cool surfaces of the marble. She could not deny that the chess-table was there.

Neither could she deny that it had pink and white squares and a dark border, soft-tinted in the night's steamy light. "Three colors of marble," the emerald-crested phantom had said, "from three continents."

Louise sat down at the table and passed her fingers idly over the squares. The surface was smooth as a single sheet of glass. She wished for chessmen simply for the pleasure of using the table.

It would be fun, she thought, to play chess by moonlight. Strange that the man in the mask should have heard of her weakness for this game. Was he not very clever to suggest a pastime so intriguing?

Very clever, and perhaps very wicked. She wondered.

She watched the funny shadows from her fingers, and tried to form the outlines of the players. She succeeded in making two bishops and a knight, but they refused to distribute themselves to separate squares.

"I wonder where the chess-men are kept," she said aloud.

To her astonishment a drawer slid open silently from beneath the table's surface.

"I must have touched a button," she said. "But where?"

She tried pressing the ends and sides and undersides of the surfaces, hoping to discover the source of the seemingly magic action. However, no button was to be found.

"How curious," Louise murmured. "I've never believed in ghosts or witches or magic, but yet—what shall I find here?"

From the drawer she lifted the scarf of black silk that had been laid neatly over the contents.

"O-o-oh! What beautiful chess-men! They're jeweled! And so intricately designed!"

For a long moment Louise simply stared at them. They seemed too wonderful to be touched. She could not have been more fascinated by a chest-

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ful of gold and precious stones.

She reached, then, to take a white king—reached slowly, hesitantly, not quite certain whether she ought——

Swish!

The white king leaped into her fingers!

As a small piece of steel might jump toward a passing magnet, so this little doll of carved ivory bounded from the drawer to her approaching hand. Louise held it up to the light, pressing it tightly. Another hidden button perhaps? An electric eye? An unseen spring?

Again Louise felt the chilling nerves of uncertainty and fright playing through her body. She looked at the great white mansion, half a mile away. It stood there, reassuring her, and beyond its shadowed walls was the wide lake, alive with moonlight. She was not dreaming; but this garden somehow contained the curious fancies of a dream come true.

She reached for the white queen. It jumped into her hand. Then, as she started to place both pieces on the board, they hopped down to the correct squares.

Castles, bishops, knights and pawns—black and white—they all cooperated. In a twinkling every piece was in its place. The knights, however, Louise had to pick up to examine more closely, for she had never seen any quite like them. Instead of being the usual horse heads, they were swordsmen, from head to toe perfect miniatures of ye knights of olde. What particularly attracted Louise's attention was the flash of the swords. She fancied that the black knight had moved his weapon in a gesture of defiance. The blade had flashed light upward toward a bough of silver maple that overhung the table, but the movement had been so swift that she couldn't be sure.

LOUISE had only her own two eyes with which to verify all this surprising conduct. What she had seen thus far was disturbing, and she would have preferred to think it all a matter of mechanical tricks, together with certain deceiving effects of moonlight and shadow. Her chosen world was a world of scientific fact. In her capacity as the nation's very popular "Miss Citizen" she had bent every effort to influence the nation's lawmakers from a scientific point of view.

She had, in fact, urged that the legislative minds in Washington would do well to throw personal grudges and personal ambitions to the winds and to give an intelligent ear to the voices of the world's scientists. If she had consented to stay on for a fourth year in the honorary position of "Miss Citizen" she would have assembled a conclave of the world's scientists in Washington to present a summary of what the mid-twentieth century world of science might offer for a world of better government.

This plan she had carried so far as to extend a number of provisional invitations. And then, soon afterward, she had been forced to withdraw them. Out of consideration for her own personal welfare she had suddenly withdrawn from good-citizen activities.

Such was her popularity that her influence would not end at once. The editorials all over the country had assured her of that. She had been called a girl genius, a political prodigy, a natural leader. All of which had made her smile with what the movie commentators had termed her characteristic modesty. She denied that she was in any sense a genius. She could not be termed a politician in the conventional sense, for she had no ambitions for a spectacular personal career.

"My political philosophy is simply

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this," she had said over and over. "We possess an abundance of sure knowledge. Let us apply what we know. Let our government always look to the facts that science has supplied. If these facts are consulted, a fair government will know what to do for the general good. If these facts are disregarded, it means that the government prefers to play favorites and serve selfish interests. In this age of science no lawmakers in the world are justified in blundering along with the mistakes of yesterday. The roads have already been cut through the jungles of stupidity and ignorance. We have only to use them."

When Louise Wilmott said these words over the radio, everything was perfectly clear to her. The earth stood solid beneath her feet, and her eyes saw clearly the goals ahead.

How far away all of that seemed tonight! She had left one universe and stepped into another, it seemed. This new universe was somewhat topsy-turvy; it was shockingly disordered; it made her feel giddy, the way she had once felt after too many exciting rides at Coney Island. And somehow she welcomed it—it was all so gay and different.

SHE began to play a game of chess. She moved the white king's pawn, and ventured forth with her bishop. And to her great delight her black opponents moved themselves. Presently she found her king in check. She laughed aloud, and scooped the pieces toward the drawer. They leaped in and the drawer closed itself silently.

"It must be hours past midnight," Louise said, as she hurried back across the garden. "But I'll come again tomorrow night. I wonder if *he'll* be there again. I wonder——"

Someone was coming out from the house to meet her: Brenda, the cook.

"Child, what ever happened to you? I was worried to death. Are you all right?"

"Of course, Brenda. Why?"

"I never thought you'd go so far. It might be dangerous. Myself, I never go beyond that last row of rose bushes. Your auntie used to say it wasn't safe for anyone but Teddy White and the gardeners to go straying around."

"Why not?"

"Don't be upsetting me with questions like that," said Brenda, leading the way back to the house. "Do you think I'd sleep tonight if I started telling you tales about all the pets we've lost along that ravine at the north side of the gardens?"

"Pets?"

"Not to mention two or three gardeners. Yes, and a three-year-old child."

"Brenda! When did any such things happen?"

"There now. I'm not going to say a thing about it. Do you think I want to spoil your night's sleep? I wouldn't do that—though there's precious few hours left to sleep. Now you come right into the kitchen with me and we'll have that midnight snack—unless you'd rather I'd make it breakfast and be done with it."

"Brenda, you've got to tell me. Whose child was it? Did my aunt know? Did the officers come and search?"

"Not another word, child. Here, take this glass of milk. I'll have a sandwich ready in a jiffy. After your long ride I'm blessed if I can see how you could spend half the night mooning around in the garden. Now——"

"Brenda, tell me about Theodore White." Louise spoke out of the reverie that still hung over her. "I'm curious to see him. He must be tall and slender and broad-shouldered, and he speaks in a deep voice."

"H-m-m. Did you ever win a guess-

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ing contest?"

"Am I right?"

"You couldn't be wronger. His voice is as deep as the chirp of a week-old chick that's lost its mama. And tall? I doubt it he comes up to my chin."

"Oh," Louise voiced her disappointment. "And he isn't young?"

"A spring chicken, as I said before. Around fifty. He's a sweet boy, Teddy. A bit jumpy and full of nerves like a schoolboy. You should see how interested he was when those letters started coming in for you with the names of all those scientific laboratories on the envelopes. It was all I could do to keep him from reading them."

"He probably knows some of them. I wonder what they wrote."

"Open 'em, child."

"Not till morning," said Louise dreamily. "My head is too full of other things to think about science tonight."

"I'll have a lot to tell you about how things are going when you want to listen. Teddy's a sweet boy, as I say, but he's no manager. He's so deep in his private studies he doesn't do a thing to keep the place up. The sensible thing would be to get rid of him. He hires garden workers and forgets to pay them. I declare we'd starve to death around here if I had to depend on him to balance the grocery budget. Just like a forgetful schoolboy. Sometimes I think I ought to take him across my knee and spank him. And then again I tell myself that when a boy gets to be fifty he's too old to spank."

"We'll discuss the matter later, Brenda," Louise said, smiling. "Good night."

A SUDDEN thumping of feet on the stairway caused Brenda to ejaculate, "Good heavens! The house must be falling in!"

"Brenda! Brenda!" came a shrill voice from the stairs—a squeak that reminded Louise of a motherless chick.

Brenda gathered up her skirts and thumped up two flights of stairs with remarkable spryness for a woman of sixty-five. Louise followed her, and by the time they reached the third floor they were both following Professor Theodore White.

The professor was tiptoeing along the corridor in his flannel nightshirt. With his thin white hands he was shading his eyes from the wall lights as he tried to peer through the door of his study. He stopped and stroked his short white beard thoughtfully.

"I'm positive I heard someone on the roof," he said. "I'm positive, Brenda. I wanted you to corroborate my observation."

"Does that mean you want me to climb up and see?" said Brenda.

"I think it must be spies," said Theodore White. There was a frightened tremolo in his squeaky voice. He saw Louise, then, and gave an astonished gulp. "Where'd you come from?"

"I'm Louise Wilmott. I've come to spend a few months——"

"Were you up on the roof looking through my skylight? No, it couldn't have been you, because it was a man." The professor gave a laugh of confusion. "And you're a girl."

Louise smiled. She observed that Teddy White had an amiable face and a high forehead, and he wore his spectacles well even when in his nightshirt.

"A false alarm," Brenda grumbled. "You've been dreaming things."

"I'm completely awake," said Teddy White. "What I saw was no hallucination. I had simply tilted my head back, the better to contemplate certain matters pertaining to the square feet of surface over the face of the planet,

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when my gaze suddenly came to a focus upon this gentleman—if an eavesdropper may be called a gentleman—you'll permit me this liberty——"

"Go on," said Brenda.

"He was leaning forward over the skylight, so that the forelock of his bushy hair marked the dust on the glass—and if you'll look closely now as we go in you'll see the arc he described as he swung out of sight."

"Did he wear a mask?"

"Only the sly mask of an evil countenance. He must be a spy. He must have known that this is the week—" Theodore White's voice lowered to a whisper—"this is the week that my most sensational theory goes down in black and white."

"What are we going to do?" Brenda asked.

"If he's up there with a gun," said Louise, "we're not safe at this open doorway. Is there another door we can enter?"

"This way," said Brenda.

LOUISE followed them back through the corridor and into a dark storeroom. They moved a dusty piece of furniture and opened the door just wide enough to peek through. Louise caught a glimpse of a deskful of papers, surrounded by globes, maps and wall hangings full of mathematical formulæ.

Only the green desklight was burning, but it was sufficient to cast a dim glow across the skylight.

The marauder was there, all right, a dark form against the night sky. He wore no mask, no gloves, no jewels. His face could not be seen clearly, but Louise noted that his head was wide at the cheek-bones. His thick eyebrows and heavy mustache might or might not be false.

"He's working with a glass-cutter," Brenda whispered. "See?"

"Doesn't anyone have a gun?" Louise asked.

Click. The small rectangle of glass was freed from the pane, to be lifted out by a handle of adhesive tape. Swiftly another bit of tape came sailing down through the aperture, suspended from a cord. The marauder passed his arm through and began to maneuver the cord, trying to catch one of the desk papers with the tape.

"But you can't have those!" Theodore White screamed and burst through the door like a barking terrier. He grabbed the paper that had started to sail upward.

Then came the crash.

Louise was not sure that the man overhead meant to fly through. Down he came with a great crash of glass.

He came, wits and all.

He landed on the desk first, bounded to the floor, whirled, scooped up an armful of papers, thrust them into the collar of his dark blue shirt.

In the flurry of excitement Louise saw him strike at Teddy White; she saw him start in her direction, then shift toward the other door where Brenda had gone to block his way. He flung Brenda aside savagely and dashed out. His footsteps thudded down two flights of stairs and he was gone.

CHAPTER III

Business for the Doctor

THE following morning a part of the household sat around on the east porch displaying black eyes and bandages. From their doleful talk one might guess that they hadn't enjoyed their brief game of cops and robbers. The worst of it was that the robbers had won.

"My theories! My pet theories.

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Those brain children that I've nursed along from infancy! Where are they now?" Theodore White wailed.

"They're in that roof-smasher's blue shirt," said Brenda. "I hope they give him congestion of the lungs."

"My pets! All my wonderful words of erudition! What will the world do without them?"

"The world will have to cripple along somehow," said Brenda. "But we've got to have a new skylight before it rains."

Teddy White lingered around sorrowfully. To one of his pallid complexion a black eye was a conspicuous adornment, not altogether unbecoming. Each time he passed a mirror he liked it better. It was, in a way, a badge of manhood, symbolizing the courage of his attack upon the big, brown-haired invader.

"I do believe Teddy is growing up," Brenda said, coming into the drawing room where Louise was opening her letters.

"How are you feeling, Brenda?" Louise asked. "Are the glass cuts paining you much?"

"Scratches," Brenda said, disdainfully. "Just an excuse for bandages. What hurts me is that I didn't have a flatiron in my hand when that big grizzly bear pushed me in the face. Who do you suppose he was? Oh, pardon me, I see you're busy."

"Yes, this mail turns out to be rather important," said Louise.

"You go right ahead. I'm having the maid take care of the breakfast duties this morning. She'll be right in with some toast and coffee."

The toast and coffee came at once, and Theodore White and Brenda joined Louise around the tray.

"I'm surprised that my chauffeur hasn't come down," said Louise. "Has anyone seen him this morning?"

"I was surprised he didn't show up for the excitement last night, I don't see how he could have slept through."

"And he used to be a prize fighter," said Louise. "I'll see that he's with us if we have a return engagement."

"It won't happen again," Teddy said, holding his white head sadly. "It would take me years to assemble another such army of facts and figures. It's gone."

"There, there. Don't cry over spilt theories, young man," said Brenda. "Just go right after it again. In another ten years or so—"

"What was your theory?" Louise asked. "What could the thief do with it?"

Professor Theodore White looked up very curiously. He put his coffee-cup down. He rose to his feet, cast his visionary eyes toward the ceiling and stroked his white beard thoughtfully. Finally he spoke, in solemn words.

"I don't know. As a matter of fact precisely speaking, I really don't know."

WHEN breakfast was done, the chauffeur had not yet appeared.

The maid returned with a note.

"He wasn't in his room, Miss Wilmott," the maid said, "but he'd left this note for you in the hall door."

Louise scanned the message.

"Miss Wilmott—It is about an hour after midnight as I write this note. I met the man in the mask just now and he told me you wanted me to go back to the Lantern Village to get the doctor, so I'm on my way at once. I hope this is all right with you. He told me you were still out in the garden and might not want to be disturbed. So here goes, and I'll be back by breakfast if I can."

Louise read it aloud. When she had finished, all three of her listeners asked in bewilderment, "The man in the mask?"

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Louise looked from one to another of them. Brenda's laughing old eyes were question marks. Teddy White's friendly and over-intellectual face took on a scowl of puzzlement. The thin, angular maid stared, sad-eyed, obviously baffled.

"Listen to me," said Louise with a note of sharpness. "All three of you have lived here for years. You are, in fact, the only persons who have been here continuously, so far as I know, since the death of my aunt. Various gardeners and other employees, I understand have come and gone. But you three—you should know what there is to be known about this place. Am I right?"

There were three affirmative answers.

"Very well, I wish to know what you know about this man in the mask."

"Horrors!" Brenda excaimed. "I never heard of him."

"And you, Janet?"

The maid looked as if she might burst into tears. She stammered that she knew nothing about any strange people whatsoever, not counting Brenda and Professor White.

"Professor White," said Louise, "you are in charge here. Since the death of my aunt the good order of this estate has been your responsibility. Are you aware that there is this very mysterious person—this man who wears a black fan-shaped head-dress with a band of jewels, whose face is masked in black silk, whose belt is studded with emeralds . . .? Well?"

"Was he barefoot?" the professor asked. "Or was he wearing white shoes? From my third floor window I can't discern such details."

"Then you have seen him!" said Louise. "It happened that he was not barefoot when I met him last night, though from his habits I would suspect he might prefer that mode. At any rate you are aware that this place is being watched—I might say *haunted*—by this weird apparition."

"I really hadn't given it any thought," said the professor blankly. "But I'll set my mind to it."

His lack of concern annoyed Louise. She put questions to him pointedly. What did he think when he first saw this black ghost? Didn't he consider the possible implications—arson, robbery, even murder?

Teddy White shook his head like an errant pupil. "Usually when I look out of my window late at night I don't pay any attention to what I see. My theories are the one and only focus of my concentrations. That's the way it was the night that little three-year-old boy strayed off through the garden and got lost in the ravine. Afterward I remembered having seen him—"

THE sound of a car interrupted this discourse. The chauffeur had returned from Lantern Village. Accompanying him was a round little doctor with double chin that filled the open collar of his checkered sports shirt.

"Well, well, well," said the doctor in a great round voice. "What an ideal spot for a sanitarium. I don't often get back into these deep woods. Nice view. How many neighbors do you have around this lake? I've counted twenty-five houses and they all look like castles. Enough to support a good sanitarium. Well, well, we'd better get busy. I'll need some hot water to boil these instruments and we'll have those bullets out in a matter of minutes."

"Bullets?" Brenda gulped. "Whose bullets?"

"I'm not concerned with that end of the case," said the doctor. "Lead me to the patient, please."

"Doctor Marcus, there isn't any patient," said Louise. "That is, not yet."

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"What do you mean, no patient *yet?* What is this—an obstetrics case? They told me——"

"Please sit down, Dr. Marcus. I'll explain."

"I'm a busy man," the doctor growled. "What's this all about?"

"I'm Louise Wilmott. I came here last evening——"

"Louise Willmott! Oh! Well! Well! I thought I'd seen that pretty face before. I never miss the newsreels. You're taking a vacation, I understand."

"Yes—at my own estate—for the first time. Last night after I arrived I met a very mysterious person in the garden. To make a long story short, he convinced me that we would need you very soon——"

"To remove bullets," the chauffeur added.

"I don't understand," said the doctor. "When is the shooting supposed to start?"

Louise shook her head. No one knew, unless it would be the strange young man in the jeweled mask.

"See here," said the doctor. "I'm a very busy man, but I always have time for important people. Suppose you tell me, Miss Wilmott, all the circumstances of this meeting. "

"Well—" Louise hesitated. "It was all very bizarre. I haven't told Brenda or the others because — well, I was rather tired, and this morning it seemed too—too impossible——"

"Did anyone else see the man in the mask?"

"I did," said the chauffeur. "I met him in the garden after he had talked with Miss Wilmott."

"Very well, Miss Wilmott," said Dr. Marcus. "Give us your whole story—or if you prefer to tell me alone——"

Louise was quite willing to have the others hear. She recounted each detail of the previous evening's adventures. She did not omit the curious behavior of the chess-men. The later episode of the skylight, too, came in for its recounting. But Louise was inclined to regard the events as separate. She believed that the skylight intruder and the jeweled ghost were two different persons.

When the doctor had heard all accounts he shook his head importantly. "It doesn't make sense, does it—to you? Very strange, you think? I've come not a minute too soon. Miss Wilmott, come out on the porch and I'll speak with you alone . . . Very well, bring your friend Brenda, too, if you prefer."

The doctor added that there was no friend like an old friend—a remark that brought a quick rebuff from Brenda, who insisted that she was just in her prime.

WHEN the three were alone on one of the south porches, the doctor lowered his voice to give forth a few brusque words in confidence.

"I'm not partial to removing bullets. If it's a case of a troubled brain instead, I don't hesitate to apply a psychological scalpel to remove the offending complex."

"Whose brain are you talking about?" asked Brenda.

"Not yours, you may rest assured," Dr. Marcus said, turning a sly twitch of his cheek toward Louise. "Frankly, Miss Wilmott, these stories add up to a mental case. Still more frankly, you may be it."

"I?" Louise gasped.

"You've admitted the necessity of escaping to the country, of arriving here very tired, of yielding to a foolish compulsion to spend a couple of hours in the moonlight when you should have gone straight to bed. If—and I must

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emphasize the *if*, since I have not had time for a systematic diagnosis—if you come here on the verge of an exhaustion psychosis, it would not be surprising that you should hear voices and experience other slight delusions—jumping chess-men, for example."

Louise bowed her head. "I understand. In fact, I had wondered . . . if . . . "

"However, it is just as probable, I hasten to add, that my case may be the young exhibitionist who frequents this garden for the purpose of frightening people with threats of bullets. A diagnosis may prove that he should be confined in a prison rather than a hospital."

"Oh!" Louise shook her head. "Please—it's probably me—my weariness."

"Let me be brutally frank," said the doctor, whose brutal frankness no one would think of doubting after two minutes' observation. "I've come a hundred miles to handle a case. Whether it's you or the man in the mask is a matter I'll decide after further investigation. In either event, I'll present my bill to this estate. Is that understood?"

Louise nodded, weakly. She was in no state of mind to contest this arrangement.

But Brenda was fighting fit and she had the advantage of two score and more years' experience with men of Dr. Marcus' stripe.

"Why, you chiseling young whippersnapper. You ought to be spanked. I ought to——"

Brenda's hand caught up a flower-pot and smashed it down over the doctor's head. He rolled to the porch floor under a deluge of good earth and the fragrance of geraniums.

"There," said Brenda, feeling her muscle. "That makes up for missing my chances last night."

"Brenda, you shouldn't have done that, even if he was rather officious—"

Louise broke off. Sounds from the roadway attracted her attention. "Someone's coming. Maybe it's Darlene, my secretary—I hope!"

Before Brenda looked up, she helped the unfortunate doctor roll himself over to the corner where he rose to a sitting position and tried to shake off the effects of the recent avalanche.

Louise ran down the steps. She was followed by others from the house, curious to know who was arriving.

"It must be one of the scientists," Louise called back. "The letters said—look! He's weaving all over the road!"

The approaching car failed to make the curve of the driveway. It came to an abrupt stop with two hubcaps screeching against the low rock wall.

The stranger must have been asleep or ill, Louise thought. She waited at the porch steps while Brenda and the chauffeur hurried across to see what was what.

The chauffeur was first to reach the car door. His spoken greeting received the feeble response of whispered words from the stranger's lips.

"He's passing out!" the chauffeur called back. "Someone's shot him in the chest. He thinks he's dying. Where's that damned doctor?"

CHAPTER IV

The World Pours In

THE little round doctor had a busy day. By two o'clock in the afternoon, however, it was all over and he blustered a sigh of relief and asked for a drink.

"I'm glad I came, in spite of that Amazon that tried to murder me with a flower-pot," he said, between healthy

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gulps of wine. "If you can keep the customers lined up for me every day I'll lease this property for a hospital."

The customers hadn't been so numerous, however. On totaling up his bill he discovered he had removed only four bullets, and none of his patients gave much promise of expensive complications.

Since noon, much to Louise's relief, the scientists had been coming through unmolested. Seven taxis and two rented cars loaded with European scientists had negotiated the highway without even being shot at. They could thank the state police for that.

It was all inexplicable at first. The scientists were so amazed that they could talk of nothing else all day.

Louise was more amazed than anyone. She had come here for a vacation. She had assumed that her latest communications to these noted men of letters would cancel her earlier plans for meeting with them.

But the stack of mail she had found waiting for her here had dispelled that illusion. The men of science, fifty or more of them, had gotten in touch with each other and agreed that Louise Wilmott's plan was so promising it must not be dropped. And so, even though she had retired from her three-year throne of honor as Miss Citizen, they would come anyway.

As the French botanist observed, "Ze eenfluence zat you wield cannot be thrown to ze weends. Ze world she steel have her on you."

And so they were arriving by twos and threes and dozens.

The mysterious enemy that sought to bluff them out with bullets could not be accounted for. Before noon the desperadoes either ran out of ammunition or were frightened away by the state police.

It was naturally a day of great confusion, complicated by new arrivals hourly, and further complicated by the coming and going of state officers who were determined to make a speedy roundup of the anonymous troublemakers.

The officers ran into thick storms of violent talk in unknown tongues in their search for a key to this mystery.

Dr. Marcus steered them away from any consideration of a masked man or jumping ivory on a chess board near the garden pavilion. The crusty doctor warned them that they should discount any testimony of Louise Wilmott, pending his own investigation of her sanity.

Consequently, the police were left only the skylight intruder as their suspect. And they were't entirely satisfied that he had any motive for roadside attacks. Why should he take potshots at scientists he had never seen? Evidently he had already got what he wanted; namely, Professor White's papers.

The possession of the papers, however, might not give this desperate thief a complete monopoly on their contents. Was it not possible that Professor White was planning to pass his knowledge on to these visiting scientists? If so, the criminal must have intended to puncture this plan by turning them back.

Professor Theodore White stroked his little white beard thoughtfully.

"Donate my theories to these visiting scientists? By the great Greek scholars, it could be done! As a matter of fact, scientifically speaking—yes, it could be done. By the great Greek scholars, it shall be done! I'll tell Miss Wilmott at once. My years of work may be saved after all. And I will get full credit!"

The officers couldn't make anything of his excited antics. They simply gave

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their promise that the gunman would be searched down, and drove away.

LOUISE had discovered by this time that she was not only running a convention, she was also operating a hotel. There were guests by the dozens, and they all preferred to share the expense of accommodations here rather than commute from the hotels of the nearest villages.

Only a Brenda could rise to meet such a challenge. She took the burden of these matters off Louise's hands. She kept the sad-faced maid on the hop, she organized the garden workers into a kitchen squad, she hounded Teddy White for help until he fled to his skylighted office.

Meanwhile, Louise was swept into the highly stimulating conversations relating to the advancement of science.

Occasionally, as she listened, her thoughts winged away to those strange and fanciful images of jeweled chessmen gliding over the moonlit marble board.

"I'm going back tonight," she vowed to herself. "I'm going back—to make sure—to prove to myself that it was only my fancy."

The radio news during the dinner hour contained one item that caught the imagination of the scientists. Louise, too, was struck through with something like an electric shock.

"No further clue has come to us," said the news announcer, "concerning the shootings which occurred along the Lantern Village road a few miles from Louise Wilmott's country home. As a matter of incidental interest, however, the young man who first notified the state police of this trouble is believed to be the well-known political orator, Robert G. Porter. Mr. Porter, as everyone knows, once won a senatorial election over James Stark, but was afterward found ineligible to hold the office."

Louise caught smiles from all corners of the dining room. These guests were an interesting group, so very congenial regardless of their difficulties with the King's English. There were Americans among them, too, famous names and faces that were familiar to Louise. She couldn't help realizing that the whole group of them loved her, and it was quite amusing the way they vied with each other to secure her attention.

The radio mention of Robert Porter and James Stark gave the American scientists their chance to recount some harmless gossip concerning the careers of the persons involved.

Sometimes Louise blushed a little as she listened. Both of these men were her personal friends. Presently she excused herself to answer a long-distance telephone call.

LOUISE WILMOTT had often denied that she was a political genius, and the public was aware that she was not striving for a high political career for the sake of selfish ambition or personal glory. But Louise Wilmott herself was something of a legend.

She had once been known as that nice little Wilmott girl who ran errands for people. Back in the small town she had done all sorts of odd jobs while attending high school. When she went on to college she worked for two years in the homes of wealthy people, as maid, bookkeeper, hostess, and companion to the lady of the house.

Wherever she went she was recognized as a person of talent and intellect and beauty that was more than skin-deep. Before she had finished college she had traveled in Europe and learned some foreign languages. Slowly but surely, her single, simple philosophy crystallized. Her friends watched her

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apply it in a thousand ways, and they were convinced.

In college politics, and soon thereafter toward the affairs of the nation, she boldly declared her principles: *Our science stands ready to serve us; our problems are quickly solved if we drop personal prejudices and look to science for our answers.*

Two promising young politicians were primarily responsible for Louise Wilmott's rise to the honorary position of Miss Citizen.

One was James Stark, the youngest senator, a relative of one of the wealthy families that had once employed Louise.

James Stark never made a speech, in Congress or out, without referring to her political principle.

When Louise recently decided to retire from her throne of honor, it was partly because of James Stark. He wanted to marry her. She was not in love with him.

Perhaps she had never had time to fall in love. But was James Stark in love with her—or was he seeking a marriage that would enhance his political prestige?

Louise had found it impossible to answer that question. She had come away from Washington partly to search her own heart.

The person who had yielded his position in the Senate to James Stark was the magnetic young orator, Robert G. Porter.

Bob Porter had been disqualified from office on a curious technicality. He was judged to be too young to meet the constitutional requirements. It was a rare case in which there were no existing records to show how old he was.

Bob Porter was quoted as saying, "My age? I haven't any age. I'm simply a part of the never-ending life of all mankind. I don't feel any need for an age."

This statement was twisted into the damning implication that Bob Porter knew his years didn't qualify him, and so his victory slipped out of his hands.

But Bob Porter was a gifted speaker, and he was put to work in Washington and over the nation for a bloc of Congressmen. They were the most outspoken champions of a true democracy, and he was their silver-tongued spokesman.

Like his one-time opponent, he made frequent references to the principle that Miss Citizen stood for. But with one important difference: "*If* science can supply the answers . . ."

That ever-present *if* was in itself a challenge to thought. It would lead the listeners to ask themselves, "Is there an agreement among the scientists on these matters? Can science be applied in this field? Would the lawmakers dare to demand the scientists' answers in politics as they do demand it in their telephones and radios and airplanes?"

Twice Louise Wilmott had been on the same platform with Bob Porter, and her brief, pleasant conversations with him before and after the speeches were her only personal association with him.

She had remembered those conversations, always with a renewed surprise to recall that the confident young orator had seemed a trifle shy in her presence.

THEIR paths had not crossed for more than a year. But somehow, as Louise now left the dining room to answer the telephone, she thought, half aloud, "Bob Porter . . . Bob Porter . . . What keeps bringing him into my mind?"

She picked up the receiver, half expecting—— But it was not Bob Porter. It was Washington's youngest and handsomest senator, James Stark.

"I've just returned from South America," came the familiar voice. "I find

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that you make news even when you go into seclusion."

"Not intentionally," said Louise, laughing. "I came here to be alone."

"And fifty scientists barge in on you. I'd call that a major accident." The Senator sounded slightly sarcastic. But in a very determined voice he added that he'd like a chance to talk with that group before it disbanded. "And I want to talk with you, too, Louise, now that you've had some time to think things over."

"But I haven't had time to think of anything. I just got here."

"Come, come. I'll bet you've had a dozen games of chess with that nutty scientist your aunt used to talk about."

"Only one game so far."

"And you beat him?"

"It wasn't with *him*. It was—oh, I can't tell you."

"You can tell me everything, Louise. You know I don't like secrets. I'm going to fly out tonight."

"Please, Jim, there's such a lot of confusion here."

"Then tomorrow night. I'm coming out and beat you at chess."

"You never did, you know," Louise laughed.

"Sometimes I think that's the reason you've refused to marry me. You and your silly chess. Well, I'm coming, and I'm going to win the game . . . Tomorrow night . . . "

Louise crossed the hallway to the oaken doors with the squares of colored glass. She looked out at the wide garden stretching over the gentle slope to the wooded hills. The shadows of the poplars spread long and blue across the open spaces. The sun was setting. One of the garden workers was riding back to the shed on the power lawn mower. Night hawks were swooping down on fluttering wings.

She ascended the stairs to her room, picked up her little portable radio and returned to the north door. She spoke to the maid.

"Janet, you may tell Brenda and Professor White that I'm going for a walk this evening. I may be quite late."

CHAPTER V

Dancing Shadows

THE rising moon gave forth its shower of strained gold. The silver maples glistened. The red roses on the trellis turned to deep purple. The graceful white arcade and the marble table softened their surfaces with a mottled blanket of moonlight and leafy shadows.

Louise placed the little portable radio on the table, and then there was music to blend with the night's colors and forms and fragrances. There was Nature's music, too—the low, humming sounds of a garden on a summer evening, all a part of the larger symphony of an enchanting night.

Louise sat, listened, waited. Her soul was in tune with all this beauty. The spirit that enveloped her was the sort of indescribable pleasure that might come with journeying far away from the practical world of urgent problems, drifting into a new universe of untold wonders.

The table was before her. She had only to touch the edge. The drawer opened silently, as if in response to her unspoken wish.

Silently the chess-men lifted back the covering of black silk and crept forth, each to his place on the surface of pink and white squares.

Then it was that the jeweled men began to move. Not as if in a game, but to the music, gently swaying. The music grew brighter; the little crea-

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tures of ivory swung into the dance. It was fun to watch them. Louise, laughing, began to sway with them, and fancied she caught a quick smile from the white queen each time the little figurine spun around.

Louise began to tap her feet. Then in response to a merry beckon from the queen, she rose and began to dance around the table.

She saw the mischievous black bishop dodge in front of the black knight and send him and his flashy sword spinning across the king row. The knight avoided falling off the table only by tumbling against the little radio. He gave the volume control a turn as he climbed to his feet. The little radio did its best then to sing its music out to the whole garden, and so the dance went on.

Dancing toys, dancing shadows, dancing hearts.

Was it a shadow that moved through the arcade and caught Louise dancing in his arms? Or a toy? Or a human heart?

Whatever it might be within its silken mask and its jeweled cloak, it was a part of the gay, rapturous night.

"I'm dreaming," Louise whispered. "I know I'm dreaming. But reality is too far away. I'll never, never wake up."

"Is there anything unreal about dancing?" the jeweled phantom asked. "I only wish there were a little sawdust under our feet."

"Yes—even if I'm dreaming," Louise smiled. "A little smoother footing—a little sand, perhaps——"

"Sand—of course. That's easy."

And as the low voice sounded in her ear there was a sanded surface beneath her feet. What a pleasant dream, where wishes could be so easily answered.

"And now," her phantom partner said, "you must have some emeralds to match my own. A bracelet? Rings?"

AT ONCE the jeweled adornments appeared to grace her hands—yes, and her feet! A band of precious stones sparkled from the toe of each of her slippers. The dance went on gayer than ever. The weight of bracelets made her aware of the graceful drooping of her hands.

But should she accept this gift of jewelry? No, that would be wrong. Such exquisitely valuable gifts! And from one whose very existence she was trying to deny!

"What are you thinking?" her dancing partner asked.

"They're so beautiful—but I'm waiting for them to disappear. I mustn't wear them."

"They only add charm to your graceful dancing. Are they too heavy on your arms?"

"Please, let's sit this one out," said Louise.

Then they were sitting hand in hand at the edge of the platform, and the gay dance was going on without them. Only now it was just the shadows of themselves that danced.

Most of the merry little chess-men were still whirling and tumbling to the radio's rhythm. A few of them were standing at the edge of the table pointing out to the phantom dance of Louise and her partner. It amused the black bishop so that he bent double with laughter. The black and white queen applauded in rhythm.

For the phantom dance was *as if* Louise and the man in the mask were still spinning about with graceful movements. Only they weren't really there. It was just their shoes and jewels and adornments that kept going. Louise could see the emerald-studded fan-shaped cap swaying *as if* being worn. She would see the rings and the bracelets glide through curves, glittering with reflected light. Beneath were her

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jeweled pumps and his shoes carrying on with swift graceful step.

"There we have it," said the man sitting beside her. "While our spirits dance on we'll sit here and talk. I hope you don't miss your slippers too much."

Louise smiled to discover that she was in her stocking-feet. Her mysterious partner was barefoot.

"I should think," she said, "that you would remove your mask."

"I hope to remove it very soon," he said. "First, however, I wish to be sure that you are willing to go farther with me into my world."

"Is it a far-off world?"

"It's a very special world," he said. "Very few persons will ever look to it with an attitude of trying to understand or appreciate it. The average person would fear it as something unreal."

"I'm afraid I'm dreadfully average," said Louise. He was pressing her hand with a touch almost as gentle as moonlight. She could not understand the spell that was being woven around her. She tried to explain it to herself. "It's utterly unreasonable that I should have come out here to see you again tonight. But I can't deny that I do rather like you."

"Will you come with me?" He rose. "There is an invisible river of magic flowing through this garden. Very few persons ever see it. But perhaps you—"

Louise didn't rise. Presently the man in the mask sat down beside her again. The music faded to silence and the radio switch clicked off. Then Louise saw that her pumps were on her feet, that his shoes had been restored, that the dancing chess-men were climbing back into the drawer and drawing the black silk over them.

"If you care to understand why I am reluctant to enter this realm of fantasy with you," she said, "it is because it is all opposed to what I am and what I believe."

"Explain, please."

"I have built my career out of championing science."

"And do you know all there is to know about science? Or is much more waiting to be discovered?"

"Much waits, I realize—but this weird demonstration of impossibilities that goes on out here in the garden—it can't have any reality."

"You dislike it?"

"I'm afraid I don't. In fact, I find myself turning to all these cavortings of chess-men and magic jewelry. I am falling in love with the impossible!"

"And why not?"

LOUISE looked back toward the lighted mansion. "The scientists are here tonight. They have come for the benefit of my leadership—they are ready to help me with the world's most important task—applying science to the needs of government. This very moment I am a deserter to my own cause . . . "

The man in the mask was looking at her very intently. His fan-shaped cap tilted back slowly, and she felt the penetration of his steady dark eyes.

"Is that all?" he said.

"There is a certain——" she began.

"Ah!"

"A man who is making a career for himself in Washington. He boosted me for the position of Miss Citizen. You may have heard of him. He's a senator."

"I know him well," said the man in the mask. "He's Senator Stark."

"Oh—how did you know?"

"He has crossed my path often enough. I should know him."

"Then he is not your friend?"

"My sworn enemy. And, need I add,

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my bitter and hated rival."

"Rival? For office?"

"For your hand. You see, Miss Wilmott—Louise—I fell in love with you a long while ago. Now that the fates have brought us together again I am more hopelessly in love than ever."

"Oh!" Louise caught her breath.

"And so I'm asking—aren't you ready to bend to this world of mine? Is this senator in love with you?"

"He's coming tomorrow night determined to marry me."

The man in the mask repeated slowly, "Is he in love with you?"

"He has professed the highest admiration for my scientific program."

"And you?"

"I'm on a toboggan, coasting—coasting away—coasting into the unknown so fast I can't stop. Please——"

"Take you back?"

"Please stay with me."

CHAPTER VI

Vanishing Act

BRENDA was having her difficulties keeping everything under control. Teddy White was no more help than a ten-year-old boy. You'd think a man of fifty with a white beard and a very brainy forehead would be of some use when it came to herding a gang of his own fellow scientists.

"Your beard should be on a frisky young billy-goat," said Brenda. "Stop running around in circles up and down the stairs. What's the matter?"

"It's my papers," Professor White complained. "If I could but find a few fragments of notes which brought me to the summation of my theories, I would have something concrete upon which to base my abstract remarks to my assembled compatriots."

"In short, if you had your papers you could talk," said Brenda. "Have you forgotten you made your gardener burn all your waste paper the night before the bushy-haired fellow dropped through the skylight?"

"So I did. With that recollection I shall deem it futile to search further."

"What are you going to do? I've sent the scientists into the big room for their conference. They're clamoring for Louise. But if you'll go ahead and give them a speech——"

"Without papers? Impossible!"

"Can't you give them some kind of a speech right out of your head?"

"I would be out of my head to attempt it. Where is Louise? Why isn't she here to quell this disturbance?"

"She's gone for a walk. But we'll get her. It's the only thing to do. Teddy, could you—no, I'd just as well do it myself." Brenda started to the door. As an afterthought, she turned back to give Theodore White what she thought was a reasonable responsibility. "Watch that doctor, Teddy. See that he keeps out of mischief."

"Which doctor?" said Teddy. Practically all of these scientists were doctors of something or other.

"Dr. Marcus. He's much too interested in Louise's bank account. Watch him."

Brenda hurried along the garden path. At the last row of rose-bushes she hesitated for a moment. For years past she had refrained from going farther. The strange disappearances of past years—she had forgotten just how long ago—had rooted a superstition in her mind.

She summoned her nerve and hurried on. Soon she was approaching the graceful columns that surrounded the little platform and marble table. She could hear Louise's low voice, now, also the deep, soft-spoken voice of a young man.

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The voices fell silent. Brenda stopped. Intuitively she felt that she had nearly intruded upon a secret moment.

Through the leafy shadows she could see the two forms—Louise and her mysterious friend. The young man was not wearing a mask. He was holding it in his left hand. And he was kissing Louise.

BRENDA glanced around her. She moved a few steps closer. She cleared her throat gently. They didn't hear her. Louise was speaking.

"To think that you are really Bob Porter!" she said softly. "It's been you all along, Bob. But how could I know? How could I know that you ever thought of me after those short times we were together?"

"Believe me, Louise, I've dreamed of meeting you again," the tall young man said. "Not in Washington, but here in this garden—near the river—"

"The river?"

"The invisible river. It's my home, Louise. That's why I'd like to have you see it as I see it. Not many people can, you know. It's right over here at the ravine. Won't you come?"

"I—I don't know, Bob. This is all so sudden and——"

"And unbelievable, even now that you know? . . . Please come with me."

"Tomorrow night, Bob, I've promised to talk with Jim Stark," said Louise. "He's determined to win over me in a game of chess. I'm going to bring him here, Bob. I hope I'll see you too. Now——"

Louise was about to say goodnight when, glancing back toward the mansion, she saw Brenda standing there.

"Yes, it's me," said Brenda abruptly. "I came to find you. The scientists are waiting for someone to call them to order."

"Oh, Brenda," Louise started down to her. "This is the man in the mask—only he's really——"

"He's really a ghost, and don't try to tell me different," said Brenda. "All right, kiss him goodnight and come on. Your party needs you."

"But I thought Professor White——"

"Teddy! That young rascal couldn't find any papers to speak from and he's in such a stew he's got me boiling."

"Papers?" said the young man in the black silk raiment. "I think I can help."

Whereupon he turned and walked off into the wooded ravine. Brenda stared into the deep shadows, a strange expression on her face.

"Did you see what I saw?" she asked Louise.

"I saw him walk away, with the moon lighting his waves of blue-black hair." Louise spoke as if in a reverie. "I saw the glitter of emeralds as he put the wide cap on over his mask. Then I saw a thousand colors in the moonbeams that carried him off into the darkness."

"Ugh!" Brenda muttered uncomfortably. "I didn't see any color. I'm not sure I saw any jewels. But I'd swear I saw him *vanish*."

"He did vanish," Louise whispered, "in a river of magic."

Presently the masked figure reappeared. He strode up and spoke pleasantly, but the mask was frightening to Brenda and she kept moving away from him.

"Here are the papers Professor White lost," he said. Then for a second time he disappeared.

Every step of the way back to the house Brenda grew angrier. Finally she exploded. "River of magic! Don't tell me! He's nothing but a common thief, lurking in our woods. Give him a chance and he'll steal the very doorsteps off the porch. We've got to get

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the police after him—the quicker the better."

CHAPTER VII

Darlene Takes a Ride

ON THE following afternoon Senator James Stark arrived at an airport within a two hours' drive of his destination.

While he was making arrangements for a car to drive to the lakeside estate he happened to find Darlene Donovan, Louise's secretary and companion. She, too, was bound for the country mansion to be with Louise.

"Just my good fortune," the handsome young senator exulted. "I'll load up your luggage and we'll be off together at once."

"I'm sure Louise thinks I've deserted her," Darlene said. "Still, according to the papers, she hasn't been suffering for lack of company. Imagine it—fifty scientists! Are we on the right road?"

The car hummed down the highway. Senator Stark always got a feeling of power out of driving, and he never drove anything less than the best. He didn't have to. As soon as he was accustomed to the touch of the wheel and the foot-feed, he settled back and turned his attention to the pretty girl beside him.

This was luck indeed. Anyone as close to the nation's Miss Citizen as Darlene Donovan would be sure to have some influence.

"I talked with her on the phone yesterday," said Stark. "I know she's glad I'm coming. Naturally." He laughed. "Not only because I'm her intimate friend, the Senator, but also on account of all those fireworks."

Darlene frowned. "What do you suppose caused all that excitement? People don't just walk out to the road and start shooting at the cars going by."

"There must be money at stake," said the senator. Darlene observed that he tilted his chin with an air of importance. It was a well practiced pose, famous for making his senatorial oratory convincing. "Whatever these scientists expect to get out of their sojourn at her estate, they must be on the trail of something with great value. Otherwise no rival gang would try to head them off."

"So you think the scientists are mixed up in a gang war?"

James Stark didn't know about that, but he was sure the police would bog down in their investigation.

"From the babble of foreign scientists there's no way to know whether some of the fifty might not belong to the gun crew. I expect to start my own investigation when I get there."

This sounded to Darlene like a noble purpose. "Could I help?"

"You'd do anything for Louise, wouldn't you?" he said, rather too enthusiastically.

"She's my best friend." Darlene wondered what he was getting at.

"I'm glad I ran across you," he said. "You can do something very important for her. You can help her come to a decision. I want you to talk to her."

"What about?"

"Me," said the senator. "I want to marry her."

"That," said Darlene, "comes under the head of not my business."

"Look, Darlene." James Stark unrolled some bills. "The next election is just around the corner. What I need before that election is the popular Louise Wilmott for a wife. Suppose Bob Porter should take a notion to run again? Where would I be? I'm willing to pay a fair price to swing the deal. See?

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"I see too well. You're trying to bribe your way into popular favor. You don't love Louise."

"Love—that hasn't anything to do with it," said James Stark, with an impudent tilt of his head. "Be your age, Darlene. The point is, I'm going to marry her. If you don't help me put the deal over you'll wish you had."

"I don't like to be threatened," Darlene snapped angrily. "You've opened your mouth to the wrong person, Senator. I'm going to tell her everything you said."

HE HELD the steering-wheel and his billfold with his left hand and shuffled out some more bills. He slapped the pack against his knee.

"There's more cash than you could make in a year. How about playing the game with me?"

"Just what would you have me do?" asked Darlene dryly.

"Put a bug in her ear. Tell her there's a rumor in Washington that she's unappreciative of Jim Stark's favors. Tell her the story is going the rounds that everybody knows she wants to marry him except herself and she's too stubborn to admit it. Tell her the congressional leaders say her scientific goal will suffer if she doesn't take her place in Washington society *as my wife.*"

Darlene wanted to slap him. If he had been anybody but the well-known senator, she would have slapped him.

"Here's the money," he said insistently. "Well, aren't you going to take it?"

Darlene was white with anger. "I'd rather die than betray a friend like Louise."

"Don't talk foolishness. That's a lot of money. Think it over while we stop at this tavern for a drink."

There was something strange about the taste of the drink that James Stark ordered for Darlene in the tavern. Darlene drank leisurely. The senator had remembered an important telephone call. She had finished her drink by the time he returned.

They got into the car again and sped off.

Darlene yawned. For some reason she was getting very sleepy. But why not take a good nap? It would be hours before they reached Louise's place if the senator kept driving *this* way.

"Where are we going?" Darlene asked. "This can't be right."

"Don't you like it?" James Stark's voice was edged with caustic sarcasm.

"This is the way back to the airport. *Why?*"

"You're a very sleepy girl, aren't you? Well, don't let it worry you. You'll have time for a good long rest."

"Everything—is—fading," Darlene said slowly. She closed her eyes.

"Make it a long, sound sleep, you little simpleton," said James Stark. "After what I've told you, it wouldn't do to have you around where you can talk—and so——"

"So-o-o?"

"So I've just called in for a reservation for you on a southbound plane. Imagine yourself taking a long, long trip down to Argentina. Won't that be pleasant?"

Darlene barely heard, and somehow it sounded very pleasant. But she was already too far away to answer.

CHAPTER VIII

The Senator Plays a Double Game

THAT evening Theodore White was interrupted just as he was being presented to the assembled scientists. What mysteries he was to expound no

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one knew. For as he was in the very act of swallowing his boyish embarrassment and clearing his throat to speak, Senator James Stark strode in.

Stark's grand entrance swept everything else aside. Photographers and reporters were on hand to make the most of this moment. Perhaps they missed the most dramatic expression by failing to snap the disappointment in Theodore White's face as he was nosed out of his place in front of the audience.

The French scientist, who had been chosen chairman for the evening, waved his arms helplessly against the battery of flash bulbs.

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" the young senator shouted to the crowd. The newsreel men followed him toward the improvised dais. "It is a pleasure to see such a fine group of intelligent faces gathered together in one room."

Fifty scientists beamed like schoolboys.

"This moment has long been Louise Wilmott's wish," the senator went on, lustily. "And my wish as well. I cannot say which one of us has wished for you more. We'll not split hairs over the credit of your coming. The point is that, at last, here tonight, we have joined in a movement for closer cooperation between science and the functions of our government.

"And so, my dear friends, in appreciation of your reception, I shall consider it my duty to speak to you at some length—"

That was only the beginning. Thus he was fairly launched, and all else that might have happened on that evening's program was swept into a trash can of oblivion.

Theodore White retired to the rear door and did his best to listen attentively.

Louise entered a few minutes late and took a seat in the rear of the room. She had met James Stark downstairs a few minutes before. Now she was greatly puzzled to discover this state of affairs. The scientists, however, were engrossed in the speech; and if they had not been they would nevertheless have listened respectfully, realizing the high esteem which Americans bestow upon their senators. They had forgotten Theodore White, who, after all, was comparatively unknown.

Disconsolately Teddy White turned his notes over in his hands, and presently he left the assembly.

Stark talked on and on. Louise wondered, however, if he might be thinking of something besides his speech. He seemed to be searching the audience for some familiar faces.

For whom? These foreign scientists would not be known to him. It appeared that he did expect, however, to see a few persons he knew. Perhaps, thought Louise, he was secretly worried to discover that they were not present.

The senator's eyes had occasionally lingered with interest upon the scientific documents which Theodore White held, until growing discomfort had caused the latter to walk out. This, too, mystified Louise.

AT LAST the evening session with the scientists was done, except for the after-meeting babble. Whether the conference had gotten off to a promise of something practical seemed a matter for debate in a dozen different languages. The young senator couldn't stay to answer questions. He had other matters to attend to.

"I'll have an interview for you tomorrow," he told the reporters with a wink. "I'm dated for a private conversation with Louise Wilmott for the rest of the evening. See you tomorrow, boys."

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The reporters watched James Stark and their own Miss Citizen as the two walked down the steps. No one could fail to note the contrast—the young senator's bluster and egotism, Louise Wilmott's quiet charm of manner.

They sauntered out to the wide garden, in time to see the late moon rise.

James Stark brought up the subject of a chess game for the coming day. "I want the pleasure of beating you."

"You needn't wait until tomorrow," Louise said. "Here are the chessmen."

"Is this the place? Where's the light?"

"The rising moon," said Louise. "Is your game as good by moonlight?"

"Better. My best moves are made on the sly," said Stark. "Damned careless of someone to leave these jeweled men out here without lock and key. All that glitter would buy a man into victory at the primaries. There. Your move . . . Oh, oh! Don't scare me that way."

"What's the matter?" Louise asked.

"I'm seeing things," said Stark. "I thought that player had jumped out of your hands. But he settled down where you wanted him, I guess, seeing that it costs me an uneven trade. Ugh! I *am* seeing things. I'll swear that knight swung at me with his sword . . . Shadows, I guess."

After more moves, James Stark planted his elbows on the table and his head in his hands for a long interval of concentration.

Louise waited and waited. The senator was not ready to move.

Out of the shadows came Bob Porter, clad in black silks and gleaming jewels.

"Good evening, Louise . . . Good evening, Senator Stark." How very natural Bob's voice sounded, thought Louise, now that she knew his identity. He was no longer trying to disguise it, nor was he attempting to take any advantage whatsoever. He removed his mask as he bowed.

Senator Stark didn't even look up. He was so completely engrossed in his losing game that he couldn't take his eyes off the board. But he did mumble unconsciously, "Don't bother me, Porter."

Louise and her friend exchanged glances. As will sometimes happen when one is in deepest concentration, Stark had responded to the familiar voice, without actually taking cognizance of the fact of Porter's being there.

"Go away, both of you. Don't bother me. I'll find a way to win this game yet."

James Stark was desperate for this game, thought Louise. He had what amounted to a superstition that if he could once win over her, he could break down her resistance against his proposal of marriage.

"We'll walk toward the ravine," said Bob Porter, taking Louise by the arm. "We'll be back sometime after you've made your move."

They started off. They heard the senator muttering to himself. "These chess-men are fishy. They don't stay put—damn it, you can't slip a false move. They jump right back in place. But that's impossible. I must have the jitters . . . too damned much on my mind. I'll take a walk too. When I come back I'll have it."

SENATOR STARK walked toward the mansion. There was a great deal weighing heavily in his thoughts just now.

When he arrived at his parked car he hastily opened a case containing a small radio transmitter and receiver.

He was angry. He wasn't used to having his well laid plans go astray.

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Where were those gunners? Why should they all have disappeared from the scene without leaving him any word? It was the plan that if they failed to turn the scientists back they were to wedge their way in among the throng. At all costs they were to have prevented any public hearing of Theodore White's secret discoveries.

If Stark himself had not prevented, the discoveries would already have been made public. Something had slipped, and bad.

Stark talked rapidly into the transmitter microphone.

"Where are you, men? Who's listening? Give me a signal, someone. Where are you hiding? This is the boss. I want to see you here on the west side of the house right away. I want to know who muffed the deal. Those papers are still in White's hands. Another twenty-four hours and it will be too late to clamp a lid on any secret knowledge. Another twenty-four hours —or less—— Are you listening? This is the boss. Give me a signal, damn it! Someone give me a signal!"

There were no return signals. This was unbearably mystifying. The senator kept trying. He never let the microphone rest for a minute. The night was passing. The chess game would have to wait. Louise could wait, too. She dare not know about this game. But where did she go?

"Bob Porter!" Stark suddenly ejaculated to himself. "What's he doing here? I thought he was at the other end of the country. . . .

"On the lookout, you men, for Bob Porter. They say he was the first to report your shooting to the state police. But how the hell did he get onto it? . . . Come in, someone . . . Still no answer! . . . All right, if I have to take this deal over alone, that's your hard luck, boys. It'll be all my gravy, you damned traitors. I'll show the whole bunch of you how to play off on me. Come in . . . come in . . . come in . . ."

Utter and complete silence.

"All right for you, you lice! I know who's been throwing the monkey wrenches, but that doesn't excuse you men. You're out, the whole damned bunch of you. That's final. I'll run this show myself. Just watch me."

CHAPTER IX

Into the Magic River

LOUISE walked with Bob Porter Porter into the invisible river of magic.

"Don't be surprised," he said, "if you forget everything."

"I can only think of the dancing chess-men just now," Louise said, "and the astonishment in James' face when he couldn't make them behave."

"Your will was working on them," said Bob. "This is the unbelievable I've been wanting you to see. When we sat at the chess table we were in the edge of this invisible stream. That's why the chess-men were so responsive to our wishes."

"And the jewels?"

"Yes, and the sand beneath our feet, and our own dancing shoes, and the very shadows of the moonbeams. But I don't expect you to understand so quickly."

Louise caught Bob's arm. Her gasp was of mixed amazement and delight.

"Colors!" Louise exclaimed. "I see the colors again that I saw when you vanished last night."

"The river," said Bob. "It's all around us. And a rare sight. But I was sure you'd find yourself in harmony with it. I've suspected it for a long time."

"And what if I weren't in harmony

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with it? It could have happened so."

"You'd walk right through it without ever knowing it was there. You would see only the wooded ravine with its steep black banks. And you might get mired down in it. But as long as you can see the brightness you're all right."

"It's like walking through a deep blue night sky," said Louise, "that is filled with a million little colored stars, so tiny that they brush my forehead and cheeks and hands. They must be tiny particles of dust, magically illuminated."

"Is the river so dark?" Bob asked.

"It's coming brighter now," said Louise. "It's all purple and red—yes, and golden, too, where the tiny little stars are closest together."

"Your vision is growing clearer rapidly. Tell me, Louise, are you still *walking*—or are you standing still, or ——"

"We stopped walking minutes ago," said Louise, glancing down at her feet. "And this time our shoes aren't trying to carry on for us. And yet we seem to be moving. We're floating along, sometimes with the current, sometimes against. Where are we going?"

"While in the invisible river we can go anywhere—in effect—for the arms of this mighty stream seem to reach out to the whole continent. Would you like to pay a brief visit to Washington? You have only to wish."

Through the riot of color that swam before her eyes, Louise seemed to be seeing the wings of the capitol building approach to engulf her. Then she was within one of the familiar corridors where a well known painting stood clear before her.

The hum of voices filled her ears. Wisps of conversation could be gathered from passersby. Two Washington correspondents stopped to discuss a matter that came close to home.

"I don't know who started the rumor," one of them said, "but it sounds reasonable to me. James Stark has rushed back from South America to wrap that scientific conference up and chuck it in his own vest pocket. Now if he can marry Miss Citizen in the bargain, the whole science-for-government movement might catch on and do some good."

The other columnist shook his head skeptically. "You place more faith in Jim Stark's idealism than I do. Every time I scratch his surface to see what's underneath I find he's either driving for more political power or more wealth. My guess is that he's got some private interest in this science meeting other than Louise Wilmott. Take a look at his career . . ."

THE scene shifted. Bob was slightly disconcerted by their having caught this particular bit of gossip. But Louise only clutched his arm more tightly.

"Whatever the truth may be," she said, "I'm not afraid to hear it."

In the next few minutes they crossed the continent for fragments of political speeches and radio addresses that were making news throughout the nation. Frequent were the references to the scientific conference at her own estate. America's alert leaders were expecting great things.

Then the river of magic brought them back to the shore of the lake, and through the misty colored light Louise seemed to be looking at her own brightly lighted mansion. She noticed, *then,* that there was someone sitting in an automobile to the west of the house. On the instant her will commanded an answer to her curiosity. She and Bob seemed to be at the very window of the car.

"It's James Stark," Louise whispered. "He's talking into an instrument.

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I thought we left him at the chess game."

"This game has him guessing, too, evidently," said Bob. "He seems to be unable to contact any of his staff."

"He has never told me about any such staff," said Louise. "Why should he be using a short-wave set?"

"When one lives within the river of magic he finds mysteries everywhere. But most of them can be understood if he has the patience to follow them. That, incidentally, has been the chief source of my education. You see, this river is my home."

"I don't understand," said Louise.

"I live here. I go and come by way of this invisible river. It supplies me with my food and clothing and shelter and education."

"But your real home——"

"This is it," said Bob. "I wandered into this ravine when I was only a small child. Somehow I was so much fascinated by what I found here that I couldn't go back. I was happy here. I watched the wonderful events of the outside world as one might watch a continuous show. Time meant nothing to me until I grew older. I never knew my age. Gradually the world from which I learned fascinated me more and more until I began to venture forth into it occasionally."

"Didn't you ever tell your parents of your fate?"

"I was tempted to, when I knew that Death was about to claim them. But I thought better of it. For I had stayed in this realm from choice. It would have broken their hearts all over again to know. And after all, could anyone understand who has not seen for himself? This strange realm is my good fortune. You understand, don't you?"

Louise nodded. She was beginning to understand.

"It's a world in which the workings of Nature's own powers are bent to a man's will," he went on. "But not to *any* man's will. There were a few other persons—gardeners from your estate—who strayed into the edges of this existence. But they were not in harmony with it somehow. They could not see what you have seen."

"And so they returned?"

"No, they didn't survive the ordeal. The luckless fellows simply *vanished*."

"You've been favored by the gods," said Louise, smiling with admiration.

"In all ways except one," said Bob Porter. His voice dropped to that low, even tone like an echo out of a deep well. It reminded her of their first meeting in the garden, when he was not Robert Porter, the famous political orator, but a lonely phantom in silks and jewels looking up at the stars. "The gods have not given me a woman to be my wife. That is something I must win for myself . . . Louise——"

"Yes, Bob?"

"What color is the river to your eyes now? Is it still the stars in a night sky?"

"Much brighter than that," said Louise. "The tiny stars are everywhere. They're dazzling like gold."

"I love you, Louise. I want you to marry me, to live in this world with me, to share its wonders. Will you, Louise?"

CHAPTER X

Insanity?

"AND then what happened?" Brenda asked, quizzing Louise the following morning concerning her night's adventures.

Only for Brenda's sake was Louise willing to recount the details of her strange excursion. She would have spoken more freely if Dr. Marcus

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hadn't been listening too intently.

But as the excitement of the experience returned to her she spoke with a glow of enthusiasm. There was no use trying to hide any of the facts. This was no dream. It had happened to her, and no world tourist could be any more delighted over a sight-seeing tour than she was.

She overlooked Brenda's suspicion that the man in the mask was the skylight thief. Brenda would be reasonable when she understood.

Far more serious, Louise discounted Dr. Marcus' attention to investigate her sanity. She did not realize that this morning he was more intent than ever upon this purpose, owing to the fact that he had been encouraged along these lines by Senator Stark himself.

As Louise recounted her swift leaps through space—from one coast to another with the snap of her fingers—every words of her strange confession registered in Dr. Marcus' mental notes. He rubbed his hands exultantly. The psychiatric board would make short work of her when they heard these things—and he would see that she became his most expensive case.

"Then he asked me to marry him," said Louise in conclusion, "to share his world."

"Oh, Louise! This is dreadful!" Brenda exclaimed. "How can you seem so happy over it? Have you forgotten that he proved himself a thief?"

"He's nothing of the kind, Brenda. He's the finest man in the world."

"So you accepted?"

"No," said Louise, "because right then was when I heard your voice, Brenda. You were calling me from a hundred miles away, it seemed. I answered you, and then the spell was broken."

"Thank goodness!" Brenda sighed. "You gave me the fright of my life, child, standing right there on the bank of the ravine."

"But Bob was with me."

"More imagination," Brenda said. "You were all alone when I saw you. Don't you know that's a dangerous place? A little three-year-old-child——"

"You've told me that one before, Brenda," Louise said. "That all happened more than twenty years ago."

"M-m-m." Brenda tapped her fingers over her wrinkled forehead thoughtfully. "Why, so it did. How did you know?"

"Because Bob Porter is that child," said Louise. "He grew up as a child of the invisible river."

Dr. Marcus suddenly leaped up, slapping his hand on the table. "That does it. I'll have to report her at once." He called, "Senator Stark . . . Oh, here you are."

The handsome young senator came in and sat beside Louise. He took her hand.

"There, now," he said. "Whatever comes, I'll stand by you. But there's still a chance, you realize."

"A chance for what?" Louise asked innocently.

"To keep yourself out of an institution," said Stark. "If you'd just be sensible and banish all these strange thoughts from your mind, you'd come back to normal in a short time."

Dr. Marcus didn't care for such glib optimism. "Her condition is far more serious than you realize. In fact——"

A SHORT snarl from the senator cut Dr. Marcus to cold silence. Then the senator led Louise out on the porch where they could talk in private.

"You're going to marry me, Louise," he said. "That will settle everything. As soon as you forget Porter and his mystic notions, you'll be on the road

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to recovery. You're mentally ill, dear."

"I'm not ill, thank you," Louise said angrily. "And I'm going to marry Bob Porter!"

"You're intoxicated with fluffy visions. I've never seen you like this."

Louise knew from his talk that he was burning up with jealousy toward Bob. But there was something else feeding the fires of his mind, too. Louise recalled the hint of one of the Washington commentators—that James Stark had probably come here on the trail of a chance for more wealth.

Could it be that, even as he denied the existence of this invisible river he was plotting to make money out of it?

Could this staff he had tried to call together by radio be a group of political assistants? Or were they the gunmen who had tried to forestall the scientific conference?

Suddenly Louise was seeing it all clearly. The invisible river was the discovery that Professor White had been theorizing upon. Through one of the many gardeners who came and went, the news had leaked out and fallen into Stark's hands. To him the rumor had the smell of a financial opportunity.

Naturally, then, he would want the whole matter kept hidden from the public eye until he had sounded it for profits. Was it something to which hundreds of thousands of people might throng? Quick millions might be in the offing.

As Louise was piecing together the jigsaw of possibilities, Stark asked her a question that clinched her suspicions.

"You're going to forget that bad dream, marry me, and recover from your delusions," he repeated. "But while this nightmare is still fresh in your mind, do you recall whether it came over you easily——"

"It was not a nightmare."

"Suppose we say it was real," said Stark, pretending indulgence. "Do you imagine that the average person could enter the same experience as readily as you did, and see the same sights, and jump through space?"

Louise faced him defiantly. "If you doubt the reality of it, why do you ask? Surely you aren't planning to charge other people an admission fee to enter my private dream!"

James Stark reddened. Testily he said, "I'm afraid I can't help you, Louise. Dr. Marcus is right."

"Indeed!" She turned on him and her eyes were blazing fire. "Just how much did you have to pay to make sure he'd know all the answers."

Stark's face changed to magenta. He glanced to one side to discover the round little doctor. Marcus was running a temperature, too, judging by the way he was swabbing his double chins with a handkerchief.

"Louise, don't be absurd!" Stark snapped, "What right have you to say——"

"Plenty of right," said Louise. "A radiogram reached me this morning from my faithful friend Darlene, who happens to be on her way to South America. What she had to say about bribes leaves you with exactly nothing to say, Mr. Stark!"

"Let me explain——"

"Explain it to your voters before the primary election."

CHAPTER XI

Professor White's Theory

AS BRENDA said afterward, it was the proudest hour of Teddy White's young life. He was a perfect embodiment of dignity. The pointed white beard and mustaches set him off beautifully.

All in all, he was so successful in

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the delivery of his mysterious theory that Brenda decided he was quite grown up at last. She resolved never to compare him with a billy-goat again.

Of course, she couldn't understand what his theories were all about. But it was obvious that fifty scientists, including the few who were recovering from bullet wounds, were mightily interested.

It was a midday session. Louise and Senator Stark had come in late. They had been out on the porch, having some sort of disagreement, and they didn't look any too happy.

Bribery was the word for Senator Stark. Bribery! The message from Darlene Donovan left no room for doubt. Brenda had taken the liberty of reading the message before turning it over to Louise, just to make sure it wasn't a death or other bad news.

The contents had excited her so that she had also read it to practically everyone who came her way—the chauffeur, the gardeners, Teddy White, Janet the maid, and Dr. Marcus. Janet had fainted dead away. The doctor, on the other hand, had acted as if it were good news, and he had toddled off to find the senator at once.

Then, an hour or so later, both Dr. Marcus and Senator Stark were impressing Louise with the dangers of insanity.

But now it appeared that Louise was fighting for her rights and had not been bluffed into denying the truth of her strange excursion.

An invisible river! What a pretty thought! All these years, Brenda realized, she had been living within sight of it—or can one live within sight of something invisible?

As Louise had described it, it must be a vast, wide stream, not of water but of millions of tiny lights. It was ever so strange that it might be seen in greater brilliance as Louise became more accustomed to it. But stranger still that most people could not see it at all. Brenda wondered. What a powerful thing it must be!

Now Teddy White must be talking about the very same thing. Yes, that was it—a stream of power like a river—a phenomenon of Nature. (How Teddy could roll off those big words!) But he didn't describe it in terms of color, as Louise had done. In fact, he admitted it was nothing he had ever been able to see.

But the papers he read from were fairly bristling with the strange effects of this discovery.

"These data," he was saying, "suggest the theory that the prevalence of such phenomena have been contributory factors to the processes of evolution."

This must have been a terribly exciting statement to make, judging by the wonderment in the faces of the scientists.

"If such invisible rivers served all of life down through the ages, it may be believed that they sped up the wheels of natural selection; that they encouraged natural adaptions of life to climate and symbiotic relationships of life to life."

Brenda whispered, "Is that good?" and Louise smiled and nodded.

"In time," Teddy White went on, "we may find more complete evidence that these invisible currents of natural adjustments were never stationary, but have moved, as air currents move, but very slowly, across the continents. This, again, is purely hypothetical. The past twenty-five years have netted no satisfactory data in this connection. But by all odds the most striking observation——"

At this point Senator Stark was observed making his exit.

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This inspired Teddy White to call for a general shift in tactics. After all, his most striking observation could be demonstrated more effectively than it could be told.

FIFTEEN minutes later everyone was in the garden. The assembly was called to order around the chess table. Then before all amazed eyes, scientific and otherwise, the chess-men performed. James Stark was there, looking very uncomfortable.

"Where's Dr. Marcus?" Brenda said under her breath. "Who does he want to put in the nut-house now?"

Teddy White spoke his observations while the men watched in silence. He set forth no dogmatic conclusions on these matters, but his questions were highly stimulating! *Wouldn't it be a tremendous development if these invisible streams of power, at work in man's world every minute of every hour, could gradually bring about a new dynamic relationship between inanimate things and man's will?*

"Whatever we have here," said Professor Theodore White, stroking his beard, "I am ready to predict that the time will come when the wisest of men, in harmony with the forces at work here, will be able to utilize them to great advantage."

The French scientist broke in with an astonished outcry. "Look! Zare ees someone appearing!"

Before their gaze a man came forth, seemingly materializing out of the air above the wooded ravine. As he took form he was striding toward them. The black silks of his mask and garments were rustling. The jewels that adorned his fan-shaped cap, his belt, and his gloves, flashed in the noonday sun.

Louise ran out to him, took him by the hand. Then at her request he removed his mask as she presented him to the crowd. They crowded closer.

"I have been listening," Robert Porter said in a slow, impressive voice. "Professor White may count upon my cooperation, for I am sure he is on the right track. Already this invisible river is available for man's use. I have been employing it for my needs for many years. Just now I am using it to hold ten prisoners whom I collected, one at a time, because they tried to stop your conference."

At Bob Porter's order, ten men came marching out of the misty air above the ravine. They were a neglected and none-too-happy group. Their eyes squinted from the sudden change into the glare of the sunshine and the stares of scientists. They gave no sign of trying to escape as they were encircled by the scientists.

"They've been wanting to see you, Senator Clark," said Bob. "They think they should have some of the bills you've been using as a bribe on Dr. Marcus. Yes, they've been able to watch you from their shady resting places—and within the past ten minutes they've seen Dr. Marcus jump into his car and drive off, quite contented over his catch."

BOB PORTER paused. Several of the scientists were taking notes, some were whispering and nodding. Theodore White strutted as proudly as if he owned the world. Then he stopped, attracted by the wide face and brown bushy hair of one of the prisoners. He doubled his fist and swung. Kerpop!

"Don't punch me," the skylight invader yelped, backing into the circle. "The senator's the one——"

"Where are you going, Stark?" Bob cried.

The handsome young senator was striding straight toward the ravine.

"Come back!" Bob Porter yelled.

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"Don't chance it. Stop! If you're not in harmony——"

"The prisoners got away with it!" Stark retorted.

"Not that way. I know the secrets! Stop!" Bob bounded through the crowd and raced toward the bank.

"Secrets! Your monopoly, do you think? I'll show——"

Senator James Stark's voice faded very suddenly. His form likewise disappeared quickly as if suddenly consumed.

In weeks and months to come, Louise and Bob often wondered about that moment. It all happened so swiftly, and it was all so final. Fifty scientists would be embarrassed for the rest of their lives, trying to understand it.

Neither could Louise or her husband, for all their acquaintance with unknown realms, offer much of an explanation, except to say that some people seem to put themselves in harmony with the laws of the Universe, and others don't.

THE END

FANTASTIC—BUT TRUE

By ALEX WAMAN

Facts such as these prove that fantasy is not confined only to fiction!

IT SEEMS that nothing is impossible when American ingenuity is applied to solve a problem—not even the reversing of the direction in which a river shall flow.

American engineers were given the job of building the huge Serra hydroelectric development near São Paulo which now supplies the most important industrial center in Brazil with power. The great works consists of a group of reservoirs, dams, and pumping stations which forces the three rivers to flow uphill for 100 feet where they pass over a divide and drop almost 2,500 feet to the central generating station. This is the largest power plant in South America and was built by the Westinghouse Electric International Company.

* * *

MODERN first aid practice has been traced back to the "Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem," founded nearly 900 years ago in England to give aid to pilgrims on the way to the Holy City.

* * *

NONE of us likes to go without a delicious cup of hot coffee in the morning, but people in Europe have had to do so for some time.

The Dutch have attempted to meet the coffee shortage in their country by grinding up wasted tulip bulbs according to the Netherlands Information Bureau. They have also mixed their limited flour supply with the ground up bulbs in order to make enough bread to keep them going. The Nazis have done their best to stop this practice since tulip bulbs have a high export value. However, the Hollanders have continued the practice since it is impossible to buy real coffee and the little to be had on the black market costs around $30 a pound.

* * *

SINCE March, 1942, scientists at Cornell University working in conjunction with the B. F. Goodrich Co., have tested over 2000 different plants as a possible source for rubber. Out of all these tests, they found the Russian dandelion to be the most promising source.

* * *

NUMEROUS cases of the successful employment of blind people in war industries have been reported and their number should be increased by means of a new "talking" scale. This scale was recently demonstrated in New York City at the American Foundation for the Blind. As long as the item being weighed is under the desired weight, the scale sounds its "A" and once the item weighs too much the scale sounds "N," but just as soon as the weight is correct, the scale gives a steady buzzing tone. Using this scale, blind people can weigh accurately as well as quickly and hold down a responsible job in war industries.

* * *

IT IS too bad that Mussolini was born a man instead of a fly. In his thirst for power, he preached larger families to supply his army with manpower. But if he had been a fly, he could probably have had an army large enough to satisfy him without any trouble. For if all the descendants from just one house fly lived and reproduced

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for one summer, there would be 2,000,000 flies produced in that time.

* * *

THE use of pigeons to carry messages in time of war is common knowledge, but a less known fact is that the Chinese have used bees to deliver messages during the present war.

As the lines move, Chinese spies take some bees from a farmer's bee hive and carry them about in small cages. Messages are written, micro-filmed, and then printed on extremely fine paper. They are then attached to the bees who are released. The bees travel at a rate of 30 or more miles per hour back to their hives where the messages are removed and the information put to use. The bees are found to be just as efficient as pigeons for short distances.

* * *

THE war has shut off our source of the natural flowery oils that used to come from Southern France and serve as a base for milady's perfume and colognes. To a war weary people this seems hardly a tragedy, but when one considers how much a little cologne can do to perk up a woman's spirits, perhaps it does have its place.

Substitutes were hard to find until a young man employed by the Puerto Rican station of the U. S. Department of Agriculture suggested that the coffee flowers might be used. After making several tests, the Department announced that the flower has an odor which they describe as being a "delightful, suave fragrance." The flowers are in bloom almost the entire year and can be used to make perfume without hindering the growing of coffee.

* * *

WHEN the average person is asked the uses of peppermint, he answers to make candy, gum, and take away the bad taste in medicine. But did you know that another very important use of peppermint is in testing steam boilers for leaks and also to test gas masks for the army?

* * *

WHAT awaits us after this terrible war is over? All we hear is that we may have depression, we may have unemployment, and, in order to help feed the world, we may have to continue rationing for several years. But Europe will face all of these problems plus a more terrible fate.

According to Dr. Robert E. Plunkett in his report to the Bulletin of the National Tuberculosis Association, tuberculosis will hit about 10,000,000 persons in Europe when the war is done. His advice is that we start planning now so that effective control can be had over this terrible aftermath of war.

* * *

LEADING a dog's life may not be such a bad idea when we realize how well they are fed. According to Dr. Russell M. Wilder of the famous Mayo Clinic, "The dog food manufactured by American packers containing much of what they designate as offals, is demonstrably superior in nutritive value to most of the meat they can for human food."

He further states that humans would be a lot healthier if they would start to eat organ meats such as liver, kidneys, hearts, brains, etc., in addition to their diet of the muscle meats such as steak and chops. To encourage people to eat these meats, their point value has been set much lower than that required for steaks. Wise housewives will take advantage of these low-point, high-in-health meats.

* * *

ACCORDING to C. E. Scott, plant pathologist at the California Agricultural Experiment Station, if you use tobacco in any form you should be careful around tomato plants. Mosaic, a tobacco disease, is very easily contracted by tomato foliage that is touched by workers using tobacco. Once the disease gets started, it is spread from plant to plant by the insects found in every greenhouse. If you use tobacco and want to work around tomato plants, be sure you wash your hands with a strong soap first.

* * *

FEW people benefit by war, but our present war with Japan has proved a life-saver to the whales living in the antarctic regions.

Each year the Japs would send out their whaling fleets and kill more than 10,000 whales. The Japs were as merciless killers of whales as they are of humans. They were the only nation that refused to sign the international agreement for the conservation of whales.

The only whalers that now operate in the antarctic are those of the United Nations and they adhere strictly to the agreement.

* * *

IF YOUR neighbor can't get enough bottle nipples to feed the baby tell her not to fret too much for they have gone to war in at least one war plant.

This company manufactures airplanes and their engine department has the distinction of being the largest user of nursing bottle nipples in the world. These nipples are used to cover small openings in the engines to keep all foreign matter out while they are being assembled.

* * *

DID you ever hear of a milk suit? Well, you can't buy one now but it won't be long if the research scientists of the Department of Agriculture have anything to say about it. After many years they have been successful in producing synthetic wool fibers from milk casein.

Chemists of the western regional laboratory have worked with wheat gluten and from it they have been able to produce synthetic fibers. The only drawback is that thus far they have found no use for the wheat starch that composes the by-product. Until they do, the process is not commercially profitable, but you may rest assured that it won't be long before this situation is remedied and that suits made from milk and wheat will be the latest fashion.

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BURY ME DEEP

By LEROY YERXA

ILLUSTRATED BY PVT. VIRGIL FINLAY

When Bill Rigger fled from the slave ship, he found weird bird women who thirsted for human blood

CORPORAL BILL RIGGER ducked his head and listened to lead spatter the deck around him. Somewhere down the line a man moaned in pain. The moan was followed by an urgent cry.

"Stretcher case down here. Hurry up. This fella's bleeding bad."

Corporal Rigger shivered. The fighter plane zoomed upward again and the pom-pom-pom of the anti-aircraft guns followed it into the cloudy sky. The troop carrier plowed onward as though nothing were happening.

The corporal lifted his head slowly, like a turtle coming out of its shell. He stared across the billowing, spray-flecked water of the Messina Straits. There were ships in every direction.

The sky was dark with planes. Protection was good, but once in a while a Jerry would dive through the screen, drop his bombs and run for it.

They were going after the wounded soldier. He screamed with pain as they rolled him on to the stretcher. The sound made Rigger flinch.

Another Jerry plane broke through the protection screen and screamed downward. It dropped one bomb, then tipped over and fell into the water like a winged duck. A smoke trail followed it down, and hung above the water long after the plane was gone.

Rigger drew his helmet down tightly. He wished to hell that he could go below decks. It would be nasty down there, but at least he wouldn't have to watch what was going on. This was like sleeping without covers. A fellow had a false feeling of safety with blankets drawn tightly to his chin. Being out of sight below decks would be like that.

The trip was getting hotter than a seven-day tour of Hades. He saw red-faced Private Don Rance struggling toward him through the crowd. Rance was stumbling over everyone in sight, trying to keep his feet under him on the rolling deck. He crouched at Rigger's side.

"Ain't this a hell'va mess, Corporal?"

Rigger nodded.

"If they keep us out here long enough, the beach will look so good we'll tear through the whole German army to capture a hunk of it."

Rance nodded his head vigorously. It was getting pretty noisy. The battle-wagons up ahead were lobbing heavy stuff into shore positions. Half a dozen P 38's and a lot of Jerry fighters were after each other directly above Rigger's head. Between the roar of shells, Rance managed to make himself heard.

"I been thinking," he said. "Not that there's any chance of it; but I got a couple letters for the folks—just in case."

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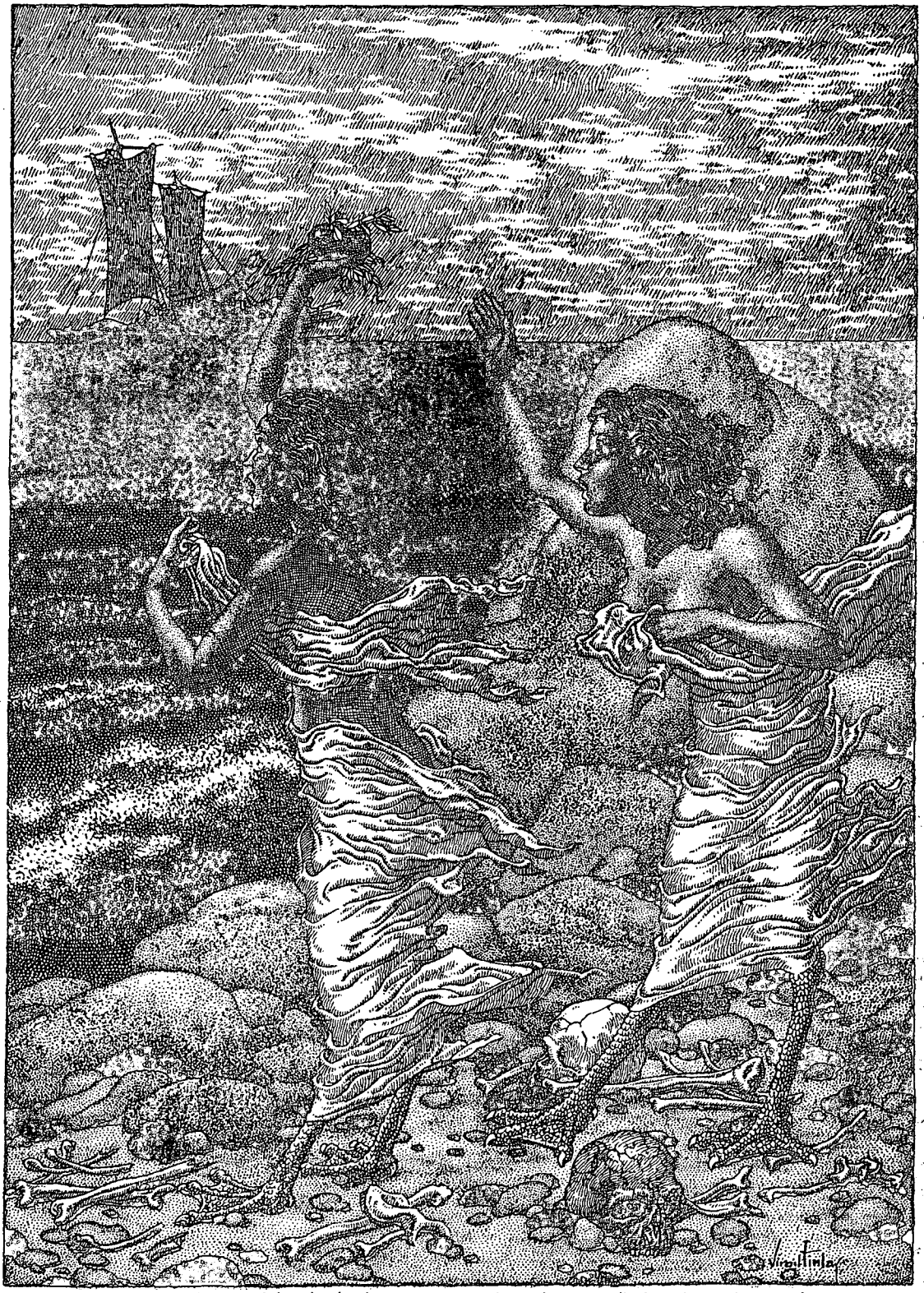

Attracted by the beckoning women, the sailors turned their boat shoroward

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His head dropped a little.

"Wonder—if anything went wrong—you'd mind taking care of my V-mail department?"

He removed two letters from his pocket and passed them to Rigger. Rigger's hand was shaking when he took them but he didn't give a damn who noticed it. He didn't feel a damned bit brave about what was coming.

"You aren't going to get hit, Rance," he said. "They'll take you for a cow and try to capture you with a rope."

Rance chuckled.

"Don't worry," he said. "If they get you first, I'll come back for the letters. Don't take any wooden *centesimi.*"

He turned and started to work his way back through the crowd of soldiers. Bill Rigger shrugged. How much longer would the trip last? How long would *they* last?

Someone dug an elbow into his ribs. "Duck—it's a heavy one!"

He leaned forward, still sitting cross-legged, his face close to the deck. He wanted to wriggle into the helmet, hide his entire body under it. Suddenly the deck seemed to expand under him, and blow wide open. He felt himself being lifted into the air; and in a detached sort of way he wondered what had happened. He didn't pass out. It was like watching someone else being blown high in the air, and dropped overboard. No pain—no fear.

THE transport was gone. The sky was clear of planes. Rigger felt himself sinking again, and struggled wildly to get fresh air into his lungs. Waves rolled over his head and he held his breath. It seemed hours before he came to the top again. This time it wasn't so bad. He didn't try to fight, but accepted the cool green water as a matter of course. It was better than being ripped apart by high explosive stuff. He knew vaguely that he was drowning, but it didn't seem to frighten him greatly.

Then, as he came up for the second time, a terrible fear gripped him.

Three times and you're out.

The meaning of the words rolled back to him. Words spoken in boyhood days. *If you're drowning, three times and you're out.* Then he started to fight back. To struggle against the huge merciless beast, the sea. He threshed around, swinging his arms, kicking savagely. The waves knocked the wind out of him.

An Army doesn't wait for a soldier. Corporal Rigger realized that, at this moment, he was important only to himself. Now his breathing was more even. He paddled easily with both hands. The chill of the water gradually deadened the feeling in his arms and legs.

Five minutes passed. The old fear came back. He didn't have a chance. His teeth chattered and his arms were numb to the shoulders. Was it worth fighting for? He'd have to give up sooner or later. His heart was pounding like a hammer. The strain was terrific. He took a last desperate look around. As far as he could see, dark waves scudded before the wind. The sky was cloudy and pungent with smoke. Here, an army had passed, and left him in its wake.

Perhaps it had left something for him to cling to. He started to swim with all the strength that remained in him. A cramp seized his arm, and gritting his teeth against the pain, he twisted in the water and tried to move slowly ahead with the other. He was like the Jerry plane that was knocked from the sky. Soon his body would go out of control, turning and twisting slowly toward the bottom.

Something was bobbing on the sur-

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face ahead of him. He struck out bravely, hopefully, toward it. . . . Then tears welled into his eyes.

It was an apple. Nothing else—just a small, round apple.

Bill Rigger hadn't asked for food. He asked only for life.

He reached angrily, clutching the bit of fruit in his palm. He lifted it, swearing loudly, and tried to throw it away with his last bit of strength. It was Rigger's last gesture of defiance toward life. He couldn't let go of the apple. As his fingers held it, a strange, inexplainable warmth coursed through him. It was like a slight, warming electric shock. A shock that made him suddenly vibrant and alive once more.

He didn't want to fight. He had no thought of death. His eyes closed and his tired body shuddered and relaxed. Coporal Rigger felt soothing, restful water closing over him.

BILL RIGGER thought he had been dreaming. He floated on the surface of a calm sea. The water rippled slowly against his body. It was crystal clear, and by rolling over, he could stare down at the sandy bottom and watch tiny fish as they darted around beneath him.

He still held the apple firmly in his hand. Once he tried to bite it, as he was growing hungry. It was hard as polished brass, and painted to represent perfect fruit. Rigger hadn't had time to think about the situation he faced. The transition had been too abrupt. He wasn't even sure that he was alive. This sun-warmed sea might be in another life. He floated on the water without effort. Somehow he credited that to the apple, for it was his possession of the apple that had changed things so much.

An hour—or was it more?—had made a great change in his thoughts. Could a magic apple make a stormy sea calm? Could it keep him afloat?

He wondered if there was any chance of rescue.

He had hardly accepted that thought, when a tiny black speck appeared on the horizon. He watched it eagerly, afraid it would fade away.

What had happend to Don Rance and his buddies? Had they managed to land an establish a beach-head? Perhaps he'd know soon. The boat was growing larger, and as it came toward him, Rigger felt a queer uneasiness growing within him.

Things weren't so right, after all. Somewhere, somehow, a page in history had been torn from the book, and pasted back in the wrong place. Bearing down upon him was a square-sailed, ancient Phoenician galley. He watched it with widening eyes, seeing the clean, flashing sweep of the oars as they rose and fell in perfect unison. Water glittered from them and dripped back into the sea. The galley reminded Rigger of a model he had constructed in high school history class.

Even the history book description came back to him vividly.

"The galleys were propelled by slaves who handled the oars. There were sometimes more than five banks of them. The sail was square, and rigged on a single mast. The Phoenicians were masters of the sea for many centuries."

But that was William Rigger—tenth grade history class—U.S.A. Was this a dream? If it were not for the war, he would assume that some millionaire, living on the Italian coast, had spent a fortune on this reincarnation of the past. But people weren't doing things like that now. The Mediterranean was a war-field. It was being plowed by the prows of fighting ships. There was no place for dreamers on its stormy surface.

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But the galley wasn't of dream stuff. It swept in close. The oars hesitated in mid-air, as though waiting the command to fly again. Men became visible on the deck. The galley was richly maroon in color with new yellow rails and deck. The stern was high, built to run with a stormy sea.

The craft drifted swiftly, then lost speed and sulked along-side. A lean, bearded man stood at the rail. He wore a loosely fitted blue robe. His hands were cupped to his lips.

"You drift upon the water like a god who is not afraid of drowning. By the grace of Melkart, swim this way, will you?"

Rigger realized that he must look very odd, stretched out as though he were on a couch, watching the galley with dreamy eyes. He struck out toward the ship, swam under the shadow of the oars and grasped a rope that hit the water near him. Drawing himself up, hand over hand, he reached the rail and leaped to the deck.

Now the apple was safe in his pocket, for he had a feeling that to remain safe, he must keep it near him. He dripped like a bottomless bucket. His clothing was gone, except for torn shirt and pants. Now that he had been rescued, and by such a strange company, he felt a strange weakness coming over him. Worse than the weakness was his fear that this crazy existence was only beginning, that fate was playing a deeper, more significant game.

Rigger appraised the man before him carefully. The stranger might be merchant or prince. He definitely wasn't acting the part. Nor was he alone. From all parts of the ship, others came running. Most of them might, had they been dressed differently, have fitted nicely into Rigger's platoon. They looked hard and well-cured by the wind and sea. Their clothing was good, consisting of brightly colored jackets, wide-bottomed trousers, and boots.

THE captain, for it seemed to be he who had ordered Rigger aboard, walked completely around the American before he spoke again.

"You are neither curly-topped Greek nor haughty Roman."

Several of his friends chuckled at this remark.

"You could hardly have floated here from the shore of our own land."

He rubbed the bridge of his nose thoughtfully, and sniffed.

"In the name of the god Melkart, I don't see how you floated here from *anywhere.*"

This speech was greeted with loud sounds of merriment. From below the deck, the loud crack of a whip sounded. Several voices shouted in unison. The galley leaped forward as the oars churned the water once more. The group around Rigger had grown, until men of all classes stared at him in open delight. The captain was giving a great show at the new-comer's expense.

Rigger realized that he must make the best of the situation, at least until he understood what was happening. He forced a smile.

"I'm from the United States," he said. "I was thrown off a troop carrier and managed to stay afloat until you picked me up."

The captain was plainly confused and a little angry at Rigger's explanation.

"United State? Troop carrier? Are you a spy, by any chance?" His voice became gruff with suspicion. "If you are, remember that we Phoenicians are still the power of the sea. We pay homage to no man, unless his trireme overhauls and sinks this galley. I, Acko Sideon, fear no man. I bow only to Melkart."

Rigger didn't have an idea in the

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world who Melkart was, or what Acko Sideon expected of him. He did know that until he was in a better position to argue, he must win the captain's friendship.

"I, too," he said with all the humbleness he could muster, "am a worshipper of Melkart."

At once the faces about him were wreathed in smiles. Acko Sideon grasped his hand slapped him on the shoulder.

"A Phoenician, and lost at sea? You sail from Tyre? Tell me quickly, with what galley? Perhaps I know the master."

All eyes were on Rigger. Tyre? He grasped at that one clue and tried to remember his history. Bits of it were buried deep in his inner mind.

"Tyre—and Sidon, two powerful cities of the Phoenicians that rose to power together. Tyre grew to a position of eminence which it kept for many centuries."

"I sailed from Tyre many months ago," he lied. "We were tossed by a stormy sea and our galley was wrecked. I drifted on a makeshift raft, and only today it sank beneath me."

Acko Sideon nodded impatiently.

"Go on," he urged. "Who was the master?"

Rigger gave up. He had hoped that Sideon would be easily satisfied. How could he go on answering questions, when he was doomed to be caught sooner or later. He knew nothing of the city or the people of Tyre, if in truth such a place still existed.

"Go on," Sideon shouted. "Your tongue is not tied."

"I didn't know the master of the ship," Rigger said. He saw immediately that he couldn't have said anything that could have hurt him more. The men about him scowled and looked at each other significantly. Acko Sideon rubbed his nose thoughtfully and a crafty expression came into his eyes.

"So! You didn't know the master? You know only that you were wrecked, and rescued by me?"

He grasped Rigger's arm and twisted him savagely around.

"Perhaps you are a debtor? Perhaps you are an escaped slave?"

Bill Rigger's temper had been fanned white hot. He jerked away suddenly, and his shoulders straightened.

"Cut the comedy," he said. "I don't like being pushed around."

Sideon's expression was a mixture of anger and cunning. He decided that his reasoning was good. Here was a debtor, a galley slave, and a strong one.

"You act as though you had never felt the lash of the whip," he said calmly. "How long have slaves been allowed to speak so boldly?"

Rigger scanned the angry faces that ringed him in, decided he didn't have a chance, and, without warning, lashed out furiously. His fist connected with Acko Sideon's precious nose, and with deep satisfaction, he felt flash and cartilage give under the impact of the blow.

Rigger ducked quickly and tried to fight his way out of the deadly ring of men that immediately closed in upon him. It was useless. A dozen arms reached at once. He watched, with a nicely balanced sense of justice, as Acko Sideon folded up on the deck. Then something clipped him a powerful blow on the side of the head and he passed out cold.

RIGGER tasted something wet and spicy against his lips. Voices were building up in volume somewhere near him. It was like coming out from under ether, as when he once spent a month at a base hospital in North Africa. He swallowed and tried to keep from chok-

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ing. He opened his eyes.

The heat was intense, and the stench of unwashed bodies made him gasp. It was dark, and his back ached badly.

"The slave has revived. His back looks strong. Put him on the bench, where we can use strong backs."

Rigger looked around slowly. He had been stripped of every ounce of clothing, and was lying on the rough planking of the hold. Two men jerked him to his feet. Then he understood what the smell had been. Knew what they planned to do with him.

He was below the deck of the galley. In the eerie half light, he saw row upon row of rough benches stretching the full length of the galley. The benches rose one upon the other, so that dozens of slaves, five men to an oar, could work together.

They were a motley collection, most of them black, stripped and gleaming with sweat. The boatswain and his crew moved slowly up and down the benches, applying their whips constantly, with varying results. The oars moved in rhythm. Each man came forward, rose to his feet and sank back with a groan, his full weight against the oar.

Rigger staggered weakly between two men, and was pushed upward to one of the top benches. They threw him down beside a huge blackamoor, twisted a ring of iron about his ankle and turned the key.

"Make the oar a part of your broad back," one of them shouted. "Don't fight against it or you'll feel the caress of the whip."

Still dazed, Rigger didn't understand. His hand touched the oar and fell away. He tried hard to grasp it. The other five slaves were drawing at it steadily, more frightened than ever at being the object of special attention.

Rigger heard a hard laugh behind him. The long whip slashed a strip of flesh from his shoulders. He cried out in pain.

"Ha! What sort of slave is this?"

The whip snaked out once more, making a bloody X across his back. This time he knew he must do something to escape the pain. He grabbed the oar as it swept back and tried to fit his body movements to it.

The man with the whip chuckled and moved away. Rigger continued to pull at the oar. Fifteen minutes passed, then twenty. Sweat poured from his naked body. Then, because he had been toughened by long training, the task became simpler.

He glanced at the blackamoor and found the big man grinning at him. His teeth were very white and even. There was great respect in the black's round eyes.

"You get tired, Master, you ride the oars," the slave whispered. "Santo strong enough for both of us. You too fine a man for this."

Rigger didn't dare to answer. The boatswain's eyes were upon him. The whip was poised to lash out again. He continued to row with all his strength.

Gradually the pull on his muscles became too great. He tried to keep up, but he couldn't. Two hours, as close as he could guess, had passed since he was thrown into the hold. It was as though he had been here for years. He wondered how long they had to row before they were allowed to rest.

He chanced a look at the boatswain and saw that the man was occupied. He turned to the blackamoor.

"How—long—before we—rest?"

The words jerked out between strokes. The black slave grinned a little.

"Sometimes twenty hours, Master," he admitted. "You rest—ride oar. Santo will pull harder."

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Rigger was filled with the desire to cry like a baby. *Twenty hours?* His body wasn't hardened for slave labor. These slaves had spent months, some of them years, hidden in this murky suburb of hell.

Gradually, not because he wanted to, but because his strength was gone, he leaned on the oar and "rode" it as Santo urged him to do. The extra weight meant nothing to the giant black. His shoulder muscles and biceps swelled and glistened in the lamp light. He never complained, and only aroused Rigger when the whips came close.

Santo had accepted Rigger as master and not as slave. Later, Rigger realized that Santo had saved his life on the galley. Now, he had only the strength to move backward—forward—backward; his throat was dry and his eyes were on the powerful, sweating figure at his side.

Santo was a slave. He had always served; and now, in the hold of a galley, he had found a white man who appreciated his servitude.

HOW many hours he had spent in the hold of the galley, Bill Rigger couldn't guess. One torturous, half-awakening minute followed another. He worked when he could, and only to escape the lash of the whip. The remainder of the time, Santo was like a protecting wall between him and the rest of the world.

Then the order came to cease rowing. The oars halted and a deathly silence pervaded the hold. The men leaned forward like dead flesh and slept without moving a muscle. Bill Rigger could not sleep. He wondered if he might be removed from the hold.

Ten minutes passed. Then came the boatswain's coarse command.

"Row, you yellow-livered sons-o-scum."

His whip cracked out and snapped at the ear lobe of a yellow-skinned slave. The yellow man screamed in pain, and grasped at the bleeding gash that was left on the side of his head. The whip came down again.

"Row!"

The slave, minus an ear-lobe, leaned forward and fell into rhythm with the rowers. For the remainder of the afternoon the galley hesitated on its journey many times. Rigger was convinced they were near land. He dared not talk with Santo. At last, when the galley remained halted for some time, they were given coarse bread soaked in cheap wine. The wine was sour and, on the bread, it resembled bloody flesh. Yet he sucked at it eagerly and felt strength returning to his body.

Santo wolfed down his food, then turned to Rigger. He was grinning almost contentedly.

"You need not fear them now," he said. "They have all gone on deck. We can talk safely."

Rigger looked around. The slaves were talking excitedly. The boatswain and his men were gone.

"Thanks for being a right guy," he said to Santo. "You saved my life this afternoon."

Santo continued to grin.

"I served in Tyre and in Sidon," he said quietly. "You do not belong here. Do you owe money to Acko Sideon?"

Rigger shook his head.

"Then why are you in chains? Where do you come from?"

Rigger didn't know how to explain.

"To begin with," he said. "my name is Rigger—Bill Rigger. What's yours?"

"My name is Santo. That is the only name I have."

"It's a long story, Santo," Rigger went on. "I don't think you will believe me. I can hardly believe it myself."

Santo looked puzzled.

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"You are not Roman or Greek?"

"I'm Irish," Rigger said.

Santo shook his head. He was completely baffled.

"I thought you might be a man of Tyre," he said. "I am poorly educated, and have never heard of people called Irish."

IT WAS a hopeless task, Rigger thought. Yet Santo was a swell person. He deserved some sort of explanation.

"I came from a different part of the world," he said earnestly. "A world of the future. They call it America, and the Americans are fighting a war. It is a war of the land and the air, and even under the sea."

Santo weighed every word carefully. As Rigger spoke, Santo's face mirrored the bewilderment within him.

"I don't know how I came here," Rigger said. "Suddenly I was drawn from my world and dropped into yours. Oddly enough, I seem to understand and be able to talk your language."

Santo was a little frightened that so great a man had fallen into his custody.

"The god Melkart protect me for being a fool," he said. "*You* must be a god. A god dropped from a place where men stride in the clouds and walk beneath the sea."

His head bowed in respect.

"Hold everything," Rigger protested. "I'm no god. I'm not even a man, compared with those who handle oars the way you do. I told you I'm perfectly normal. I just don't understand what happened."

Santo, however, could not overlook the modesty of a god who accepted his, Santo's assistance. His head remained bowed, and he hoped that the god, Rigger, would not single him out for any special attention. Santo faced the task of serving a god with certain doubts in his poor mind.

One of the boatswain's crew, a dark-skinned man of Tyre, climbed swiftly down into the hold. He ran its full length to his own cabin. He was greatly excited and seemed very happy.

On deck, Rigger could hear men singing and shouting. He wondered what was responsible for the celebration. Then a second and third man came down the ladder. The boatswain himself followed, swaggered half the length of the ship and paused. He felt suddenly that his own good fortune should be shared with the others.

"Rest a few hours," he shouted. "We have dropped our anchor in the warm waters of a magic inlet. We have seen an island such as none of you have ever dreamed. You are indeed unfortunate for having no part in the exploration of such a place."

Beads of perspiration stood out on his face.

"Perhaps you wonder at the excitement of the men. Acko Sideon had given us leave to go ashore and drink our fill of wine. There are other pleasures beckoning to us."

He turned and his smile faded into a frown. Without further words, he went to his cabin. He was angry, for his fine speech had brought no tears or moaning from the slaves.

Magic island?

Rigger shook his head. Magic apples and island. He was too confused to know what was happening. Every muscle in his body felt as though it had been torn loose of flesh and lay exposed to the air. His brain was spinning. He wanted water. Fresh water to help a parched throat and aching stomach. His skin felt dry.

He watched the members of the crew climb out of the hold. He wondered, as they went up into the sunlight, if the slaves were ever allowed above decks.

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Then came the sound of boats scraping against the planking, and the splash as they hit the water along-side. He heard bits of shouted conversation as the crew went over the side.

"They are still beckoning us. Row, you fools! Row!"

"Lovely women. . . ."

"They hold fruits aloft, begging us——"

"It will be a feast of the gods."

SANTO'S eyes were bulging.

"When the master seeks earthly pleasures, we must await his return. It does not happen often, but should he be greeted too pleasantly, he may forget his slaves. It would not be pleasant here in a few hours."

Rigger shuddered. He hadn't thought of that. Here were men, chained by the ankle, unable to seek food. If Acko Sideon didn't return in a few hours, how would they eat?

Half an hour passed and no sound came from above. The sun warmed the ship and gradually he forgot the terrible odors about him, and slept, slouched over the oar. Around him, others relaxed for the first time in months and snored loudly.

How many hours passed before Rigger awakened, he could not guess. Opening his eyes, he sat very still, staring into the gloom. It was night. Not a lantern was lighted. Sideon had not returned.

Though he was still weak, some of the strength had flowed back into Rigger's body. He was very hungry. He tried to see beyond Santo into the darkness. Then Santo was moving, leaning close to him. He spoke in a whisper.

"Make no sound, Master. The slaves are angry. They plan to cut the chains and escape."

"But they aren't mad at me," Rigger insisted.

Santo's face was just visible. He nodded.

"Santo knows. But you are a white man. They will be afraid you might betray them. The less they think of you, the easier our escape will be."

The men all around him were talking quietly now. At the far end of the benches, he could hear the dull scraping sound of iron against iron.

"It is one of the old slaves," Santo explained. "I had forgotten, but many weeks ago his family smuggled some keys aboard. They stole them from a slaver. Now he says it is time to use the keys, and mutiny."

The heavy clank of dropping chains sounded closer to them. A low, vibrant voice offered thanks to Melkart, and bare feet started to hit the boards under the benches.

Rigger waited with every bit of patience he could muster. This might be his single chance to escape. But where to? He shook his head impatiently. No use worrying. At least, once free of the hold, he could think more clearly.

"They will fight over the food and wine," Santo was whispering. "They know little of freedom. They will become violent with drink."

A voice grunted out of the darkness behind Rigger. He saw Santo reach eagerly and knew that the blackamoor had the precious keys. Others hands were reaching toward Santo.

Santo slipped the key swiftly into Rigger's metal ring and freed him. Then, releasing himself, he sent the keys speedily on their way.

Rigger staggered to his feet, stepped over the bench and dropped to a catwalk. Santo followed and they jumped to the bottom of the hold. They found the ladder and swarmed up it, fighting their way with the mob of blacks. On deck, Rigger found himself bathed in a cool, tropical breeze.

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The sight above decks was unpleasant, but he could not bring himself to blame the slaves. They had been treated as animals, and they reacted as such. Chests of clothing, food and wine had been torn open and scattered wildly. From their actions, he knew that they would drink too freely and trouble would soon start.

"Hurry after me." Santo drew him swiftly along the rail. "Trouble will come when they have discovered that there is no more booty to find."

THEY went along a narrow passage and into a tiny cabin that remained well hidden in the shadows. Santo barred the door swiftly. He turned to the wall and lighted a tiny lantern. Rigger stared about him. The cabin was hardly over eight feet square. It was so well furnished that it evidently belonged to a man of great importance.

"You wonder why the others have missed this place," Santo said. "It is Acko Sideon's cabin. Many years ago he was my master. I was a free servant on his galley. I displeased him and he threw me into the hold."

He moved across the cabin and threw open a big sea-chest. He started tossing clothing out on the floor.

"Choose what you need," he said. "We must escape at once. When they are overcome by wine, all white men will look the same to them."

"Look here, Santo," Rigger said awkwardly. "You don't have to do anything else for me. They are your friends. If you team up with me, they'll kill you too."

Santo shook his head.

"I have always served white masters," he said. "These slaves will steal the ship. They are not sea-faring men and cannot follow a straight course. Soon another galley will overhaul them and they will become the property of a new master. It is always that way."

"But—where can we go?" Rigger had chosen a pair of brown trousers, brown sash and gray jacket lined with wool. He donned them quickly.

"There is an island close by," Santo said grimly. "Perhaps we will be playing directly into Acko Sideon's hands, but there is no other choice. It's the only way left open."

He looked Rigger over quickly, having found trousers that he could force over his own legs.

"Find boots near the door," he said. "Carry them while we swim."

They moved silently back along the corridor, aware of the growing volume of sound ahead of them. Out on deck once more, Rigger saw that Santo was right about the slaves. Some of them had hoisted anchor. Others tried inexpertly to run up the square sail attached to the yard on the middle mast. There was no wind stirring.

"Quickly, before they see us."

Santo faded silently over the rail and slipped down a rope to the water. Rigger followed. The boots were tied about his neck with a bit of twine. He turned to the black man and saw Santo's toothy, friendly grin in the darkness.

"If you hold your ear close to the water you will hear the surf."

Rigger tried it. From the east came a faint splash-splash of water against rocks.

"Swim slowly and save your strength," Santo cautioned him.

He kicked himself gently away from the ship, floating on his back. Then, turning over slowly, he followed Santo with long, smooth strokes.

He looked back once to see ghostly figures wandering about the galley's deck, like lost souls. He pitied these slaves. They would sail the ship away from the island. Then, when the first

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thrill of being free had worn off, they would be without a leader, or knowledge to shift for themselves.

THE distance to the island wasn't great. They were in the surf before Rigger realized it, and staggering forward over sand and rocks to the stony beach. Santo cautioned him in a low voice to be careful of making more noise than was absolutely necessary. They sat in the shelter of a boulder while Rigger drained the boots and put them on. Then removing their clothing piece by piece, they wrung the water out until they were once more warm and nearly dry.

The land back of them was low, and covered by groves of trees. They were barely visible in the darkness. A strange eerie silence had settled over the world into which they had come. Not a sound came from the island. Nothing disturbed the endless wash of water that rolled up the beach.

"Better look around and find out where we are before morning," Rigger said. "We'll have to find a place to lie low when the sun comes up."

Now Santo seemed to forget that it had been he who engineered their escape. As long as Rigger needed him, Santo gave the orders. Now he was content to do as Rigger suggested.

They started slowly up the beach, keeping behind boulders as much as possible.

They rounded a point at the end of the island. Here a grove of olive trees grew close to the beach. Rigger motioned silently toward the grove and Santo nodded. Rigger left the safety of the rocks and stepped on to the sand that stretched up toward the grove. Something hard and brittle crushed under his heel. It sounded like a huge nut cracking. Startled by the sound, he looked down. Lying on the sand, where his weight had broken it in two, was a human skull. One empty eye socket stared up at him. A jagged jaw bone, only half filled with teeth, grinned crookedly.

He jumped away as though it were a snake. He heard Santo cry out with fear. Then to Rigger's horror, he saw that the beach was covered with bones. There was no guessing as to what kind of broken skeletons these were. Thigh bones—arm bones—parts of broken ribs. They were all from human carcasses.

Cold sweat broke out on Rigger's forehead. Santo was standing near him and the blackamoor's breath came in rasping, frightened gulps.

"Why are Acko Sideon's men so silent?" Santo was trying desperately to retain his courage. "We have not seen a light. There have been no sounds."

Rigger nodded.

"Let's get out of here now," he said, and moved as silently as he could up the beach toward the olive grove. "Sideon's men said that there were beautiful women begging them to come ashore."

They reached the shadowy trees and went in among them, feeling a little safer once they had left the bone-strewn sand.

"Men often hide in the branches of trees," Santo said. "If wild animals are about, it will be safer."

Rigger stared at the broad, good-natured face, in the darkness.

"Santo, let's not kid ourselves. Sideon came ashore because women beckoned to him and his men. He wasn't killed by animals. Somehow I don't think it will be animals that *we* will have to avoid."

Santo nodded slowly.

"There are stories of sirens who lure men to their deaths."

"That's what I was thinking of,"

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Rigger admitted. "We'll hide in a thicket tonight. We're not going to make Sideon's mistake. We won't listen to the call of beautiful women."

RIGGER hadn't slept a wink. The sun was rising above the water in the east. It tinged the sea for miles around with a rich, golden hue. Acko Sideon's galley was gone. Sometime before morning it had drifted away under the inexpert handling of the slaves.

The morning grew warm and birds started singing in the olive grove. Rigger felt a little foolish, now that day had come, over his fears of last night. Yet, two facts remained to trouble him and prevent him from leaving the safety of the tree.

Sideon's men had not returned to the beach. Not a sound came from inland. Secondly, the beach was strewn with human bones. From his perch, he could see half a dozen skulls, half buried in the sand.

Across from Rigger, sleeping on a heavy limb, lay Santo. Then he stirred in his sleep, stretched, flexed his muscles and opened his eyes slowly. He stared at Rigger, then complete understanding came into his sleepy eyes.

"Morning chases away the many devils of the darkness," he said. His lips parted in a wide grin. "Men of my race fear darkness more than death itself."

Even in the sunlight, Rigger noticed that Santo spoke softly, almost in a whisper. He knew that Santo was still frightened, and only trying to act as cheerful as he felt he should, to impress his master.

Corporal Bill Rigger of the United States Army was gone. He had been lost somewhere during the past three days. In his place remained Rigger, a man who was lost in the labyrinth of history. Rigger, who fought his way toward safety and yet did not know where safety would lead him. He faced incident after incident for which he could give no explanation. Yet, death was still dogging his footsteps, and he had no choice but to go on fighting against it. He was as much on guard as he would have been in a fox-hole on some machine-gunned Italian beach.

He studied the ground under the trees. The grove stretched inland until the trees hid his view. A silvery stream ran toward the sea and opened into a deep, sparkling pool of water, only a a short distance away in the grove.

Did he dare trust himself as far as the pool? A bath would do him good. He looked at Santo. The black's eyes were on the bone-strewn beach. Santo evidently had no intentions of leaving the tree in the daylight.

Rigger slipped silently toward the earth. He heard Santo's breath suck in loudly. Stopping short, he waited. He stared back up at Santo and saw him pointing toward the pool. Santo's hand was shaking and his lips had turned a sickly blue.

Rigger crawled silently back to his perch and looked toward the pool. Wading in the water, so that it covered all but the upper part of them, were two of the prettiest girls he had ever seen. Their skin was dark and glistening. Their faces were oval-shaped and delicately framed by long, golden hair.

Rigger's heart leaped. He realized suddenly how lonely he was. How lonely Acko Sideon and his men must have been. How eagerly they must have rushed to these waiting girls.

For these girls were not ordinary fishermen's daughters. They had been molded as though by a master's touch. Yet Rigger hesitated. Why was Santo so frightened of them? The black hadn't uttered a sound. He kept on

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pointing, as though he wanted Rigger to see something that the American had not yet noticed.

THE girls sank into the water up to their necks. They shouted and splashed each other, flailing the surface with slim, shapely arms and hands. Their sounds of merriment, drifting upward, nearly drove Rigger mad. He continued to stare at them, unashamed that he was not playing fairly. He grew angry at Santo for behaving so much like a child.

Then the pair seemed satisfied with their frolic. They rushed toward shore and as the water drained away from their flanks, fearful disgust swept over Rigger.

From the thighs down, all resemblance to the human race was lost. Their legs and feet resembled the scaly, bony structure of monster water fowl. Their talons glittered unsheathed on scaly toes, and wide webs separated each toe. The webs dug deeply into the sand, and sent them swiftly up the bank into the woods. Then more of them came. Their cries of merriment grew to screams. They sounded like vultures who have been well fed. They had come to wash away the filthy mess that clotted their faces and hands.

Dark, scummy blood covered the surface of the pool. A dozen of them were floundering in the water. They washed and preened themselves like birds.

Neither of the men in the tree moved a muscle. Now that he had seen the whole sickening sight, Rigger felt as awed as had Santo. Yet, these creatures were animals and not too clever. It might be possible to outwit them.

At last they were gone, shouting and screaming up the trail and out of sight toward the center of the island. Rigger made his way painfully to a place closer to Santo. They were both afraid that more of the creatures might come at any moment.

"It's clear now what happened to Acko Sideon and his crew," he said.

Santo nodded his head. He was too awed to speak.

"Women—eat—flesh," he mumbled at last. "Human flesh."

Rigger felt sorry for him. Never had he seen such terror on any man's face.

"Look here," he said sternly. "It's pretty bad, I'll admit. There's nothing we can do for Sideon now. The bath in the pool evidently ended the party. Now we've got to think about ourselves. The women are cannibals and they aren't quite human. I don't think, though, that they are god-like or blessed with any special power. Therefore, we've got a chance to outwit them and escape."

"But—where can we go?"

Rigger shook his head.

"Damned if I know. We're up against a group of cunning animals. Unlike Acko Sideon, we've been warned. We'll have to construct a raft and get off the island at our first opportunity."

Santo's courage was rising. Fear was a terrible power over Santo, but Rigger's presence helped him overcome it. They had only their own poor planning to fear. If they gave up fighting, they were lost.

"We must find food, and wood for the raft," Santo suggested.

Rigger grinned sourly. It was bad business, wandering around with those bird-women on the loose. They didn't have much choice. You can't eat and build rafts while you're sitting up a tree.

"We can't go to them for diet suggestions," he said.

"Perhaps, deeper into the forest, there is fruit. These olives are too green to eat yet."

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Santo stared at him soberly.

"And if we meet these women again?"

"We'll have to chance that," Rigger answered. "There are two ways to die. We can sit up here like treed squirrels until we starve to death, or we can take a chance to fight our way through."

Santo slipped silently down the trunk of the tree and waited for Rigger to follow. They looked around hurriedly and found two heavy, well-balanced clubs. Rigger chose one for himself and passed a twisted, knotty branch to Santo.

"Those bird-legged beauties may look nice from the waist up," he said. "But if they attack us, don't be afraid to crush a skull or two."

"I will save my own bones from being picked by their delicate fingers," he promised.

THEY started slowly up the trail that led around the pool and into the forest. They had walked for some distance when Rigger placed a restraining hand on Santo's arm.

"Wait!" he said. "Did you hear that?"

It was almost dark among the heavy, leafy trees. They had been forced to come a few yards at a time, fearful that at any moment they would stumble into a camp of the bird-women.

Santo leaned his head to one side, listening carefully. The sound of the surf was gone. There was only the rustling, unhappy sound of the wind in the trees. Then, far away, came the thin scream of a bird. Or was it a bird? It came again, wafted by the wind, shrill and blood-curdling.

"They follow us," Santo said, and his eyes were suddenly round with holy fear.

It was true, Rigger thought. The sounds were closer now. Much closer. He started to sprint up a short hill toward a dense growth of oak trees. Santo was behind him, crashing through the low bushes.

"We'll have to throw them off the trail," Rigger panted. "Speed counts now."

Santo's breath was coming hard. Both of them knew what would happen if they were captured. In Rigger's mind was that relentless, frightful picture of the skull that had cracked under his boot. Of dried blood, the blood of Acko Sideon, covering the pool with thick scum.

They reached higher ground, and Rigger worked his way in among the bushes that covered the ground. Yet they weren't safe, even here. With uncanny speed, the screams came closer. It was like trying to run away from blood-hounds.

Rigger stared back with frightened, yet coldly appraising, eyes. There was no place to run to now. He had to wait—to fight it out. The skin seemed to creep on the back of his neck and his grip on the heavy club tightened until his knuckles hurt.

There were three of the bird-women. They ran swiftly, more swiftly than anything he had ever seen. They skimmed over the ground like ungainly ostriches, moving so fast that their legs jerked back and forth like pistons.

Could he stand up to them?

Rigger looked at Santo. The women had almost reached the blackamoor, but Santo, now that he was cornered, stood his ground well.

"Come on," Rigger shouted. "We've still got a chance."

He turned to run again, then realized that Santo hadn't moved. He started back toward his companion. How would they attack? How did they fight.

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He didn't have to wait to find out. The foremost bird-woman was about ten feet from Santo. She didn't slacken her speed and her eyes were burning with greed and hatred. Her mouth opened and an angry cluck-cluck sound came from deep in her throat. With terrific speed she launched herself into the air feet first. Santo whirled his club desperately and tried to avoid the wicked spurs that drove toward his head.

Rigger had only a second to realize the terrible power of those scaly legs and needle-like spurs. He waited breathlessly, hardly remembering that there were two of them who had not yet attacked.

The spurred feet struck Santo's head a glancing blow, but his club caught her at the knee. The bird-woman crumpled to the ground. Her legs had broken squarely but the spurs had done their job. Santo's face and chest were dripping with blood. His cheek was laid wide open to the bone.

THEN Rigger was in it. Another of the creatures attacked him with the speed of the wind. She landed in his midriff. Fortunately, Rigger's wind was good. He swung the club as he had been taught to handle the butt of a rifle. It missed her head by inches and glanced off her shoulder. Rigger stepped back and aimed another blow. Before she could get out of the way, the club had connected with her skull and she sank down with a muffled croak of pain.

Rigger twisted about, to find Santo on his knees with the third bird-woman astride his shoulders. She was raking his sides cruelly with the spurs. Santo, unable to rise, shook his big head slowly from side to side. His eyes were hidden behind a mist of blood.

Weakly, Rigger staggered toward them. Even as he lifted the club, his blood froze. The creature was literally ripping Santo apart with those long, wicked spurs.

There was no fear in Rigger now, nor was there pity. He brought the club down with all his remaining strength and watched coldly as the woman rolled over and hit the ground with a thump. He was at Santo's side, helping him to his feet. They weren't out of danger yet. Far away, from still deeper into the forest, came the screams of the main horde of women. Rigger knew Santo could never go far. Although his own wounds hurt him badly, he was untouched compared to the black. Santo was weak, and worse than that, he had been so impressed by the strength of the attack that it left him mentally unbalanced.

He stood before Rigger, blood running down his body, blubbering like a child. Fear had at last penetrated his mind so badly that he couldn't control himself. He had lost all power to fight, to survive. Rigger could well imagine the effect of these bird-monsters on so simple a mind.

"We've got to get out of here fast," he said. "There are more of them coming."

Santo nodded his head dumbly. He remained silent. Rigger looked down the far side of the hill. In the late sunlight a small stream was visible. It came from the hills, and was partly hidden among the trees. His eye could follow its course until it disappeared into a series of small gulleys.

He had an idea. It wasn't new. It wasn't even very clever. At the same time, it had worked before.

He grasped Santo's arm.

"Follow me," he said sternly. "And hurry."

He knew he should bind Santo's wounds, but he didn't have time. The bird-women were coming closer all the

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time. A minute one way or the other, and perhaps their fate would be sealed.

Santo was obeying him mechanically and they trotted steadily toward the stream. No need to worry yet. Their followers were a good distance behind. They reached the small, swiftly rolling stream.

"Into the water," Rigger panted. "Follow me, and make sure you don't step out of the water."

He pitied Santo from the bottom of his heart, but they had to keep going. If either of them faltered now, they were both lost. He hoped that the water trail would throw off the bird-women. There was a fifty-fifty chance that, without tracks to follow, they would go the wrong way.

Could they smell the blood from Santo's wounds? Would it run in the water and betray them? He thought not. The black was strong, and the wounds on his face and sides were clotting.

They were forced to move more slowly. The water was knee deep and the current ran swiftly against their knees. The icy water chilled them both, but seemed to revive Santo a little.

The cries of the bird-women persisted, and Rigger knew they had reached the stream, now a good half mile below, where he had entered the water. He went on, his teeth chattering, legs numb. He prayed that they would go in the opposite direction. They would think that he and Santo were trying to escape to the sea, from the same direction they had come.

Then the sounds of the pack grew faint and it was like escaping the blade of a knife and being allowed to breath again.

He must take care of Santo now. The blackamoor was hurt even more badly that he had first thought. There was a tiny dirt valley ahead, where the stream had cut deep into the soft earth. Grassy banks were undermined so that they made an excellent hiding place. He looked back at the staggering figure of Santo. Blood had dried around his mouth and his teeth were red with it. His cheek was half gone.

ONCE hidden under the hanging banks, he helped Santo find a comfortable spot on the sand. He cleansed the wounds with fresh water and bound them tightly with bits of his shirt and sash. All this time Santo stared up at him with dumb, worshipping eyes.

Rigger looked down and smiled. He had never felt so much like a small boy in his life. There was a lump as big as an egg in his throat.

"Don't worry," he said softly. "They won't find us here. We'll find a way out."

Now that he had relaxed, two of Santo's wounds started to drain badly. The bandages were soaked in blood. Rigger was growing desperate. There was nothing else he could do. He kept bringing water, and forcing it into Santos bleeding, shapeless mouth.

Santo pointed a mournful finger at himself and shook his head slowly from side to side.

Rigger tried to act cheerful.

"We'll *both* get out of this mess," he said. "You'll feel better by morning."

Santo smiled sadly and shook his head again.

"Santo be dead in morning."

His voice was so low that Rigger could hardly hear it. He bent closer toward the bloody lips. A frightened shudder suddenly swept over Santo's body. He stared wildly about, as though seeking someone else.

"Bury Santo deep!" he implored.

Rigger remembered the skull—the blood on the pool.

He knew what Santo feared most. He couldn't deny the blackamoor's

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fears. They were silent for a long time. The moon came up and the night grew warmer. Santo's voice came again, with all the intense pleading of a child.

"Bury Santo deep."

Rigger knew he had to promise, and yet it was like admitting that all hope was gone. That he, Rigger, expected Santo to die. In truth, he did; but he hated to admit it even to himself. It was the one last request of a man who had served him and saved his life, only for the pleasure of serving.

"Deep, Santo!" he promised in a voice broken with emotion. "Under stone, where they'll never find you."

Santo's whole body relaxed and he smiled softly. Rigger watched the last quiver of life pass from the spent, tired body. Then, with tears rolling down his cheeks, he started scooping a grave in the sand with tired, torn hands.

BILL RIGGER crouched behind the wall of stones that had been vomited up by some long forgotten volcano. He watched the scene on the beach with narrowed, appraising eyes. He had left Santo's grave three nights ago, and followed the stream to where it emptied into the sea. He had drunk fresh water and eaten some partly ripened olives. He felt better, but the memory of Santo still clung to him like a cloak of mourning. In spite of the sun and the sparkling sea, he had been unable to shake loneliness from him.

In the distance, a galley was moving slowly toward the island.

From the forest, the bird-women had come to lure more sailors to their death. They had chosen a spot on the beach where stones hid the lower parts of their bodies. He realized that the smiling faces, the bared torsos, must be tremendously appealing from the sea. The women were waving and smiling pleasantly. The galley swept in slowly, driven by a languid breeze.

But now Rigger became alarmed. Even the bird-women who waited so eagerly for blood, seemed puzzled.

The galley had not dropped anchor. It continued to sail toward the rocky beach. The oars were lifted but the winds in the sails drove it in steadily. No sound came from the bird-women. This was not a time for their screams of merriment. This was time for their gentle art of luring men to death. Rigger shuddered. There were over a hundred of them here.

Even though it meant his own death, he knew he must somehow warn the men on that galley. He couldn't let a hundred men, perhaps more, meet death because of his selfishness.

If he could collect his strength for a dash into the surf, perhaps his cries would reach them. He smiled grimly. If they didn't hear, at least the bird-women would have to betray themselves to capture him.

But what was wrong aboard the ship?

Before the wind, the galley had driven to less than a quarter mile offshore. It came ahead steadily. Fascinated by what was taking place, Rigger remained in his hiding place among the rocks, forgetting his plan.

The galley was very close now. It hit a sand bar and the bow pushed out of the water. The galley seemed about to tip, then righted itself slowly.

There was no sign of men on deck.

The bird women knew now that their quarry was where they could reach it. They leaped over the rocks and ran into the surf. They splashed into deep water and paddled with powerful, webbed feet. In a moment the beach was deserted. Rigger continued to stare with horror-stricken eyes as they reached the galley and swarmed over the rail.

Then he knew suddenly why the gal-

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ley had hit the bar; knew why the oars had been idle.

This was Acko Sideon's galley, and the stiffened, black bodies that were being pushed over the rail, were the starved slaves who had tried to sail away the night he and Santo swam ashore.

For the next half-hour, he tried to ignore the scenes that took place near his hiding place. They came back, carrying their stiff booty, seemingly as happy with it as they had been with living men.

Even Rigger, who was schooled in the horror of modern war, could not face the things that happened on that beach. When, after hours of screaming and chattering, they returned to their forest, he still dared not look at what they had left behind. There would be more skulls on the beach now. And later, probably the white bones would pile even higher, as other galley captains gave men shore leave.

THIS was a date with fate that he, Rigger, was keeping. The ship had returned, perhaps for him. At least it presented a manner of escape. He was thankful for that, and for the powers that protected him from the fate of Acko Sideon's crew. He swam with long, powerful strokes, letting the water roll off his sides and cool his tired back.

It had been a long time coming, this velvet night that hid him from the shore. He reached the galley and grasped a tattered, torn rope with which he pulled himself aboard. The deck was empty of life but littered with the filth that starving men leave behind them. The stench in the hold was so bad that he didn't attempt to enter it. He moved automatically toward the high poop-deck.

Into his heart came a new hope. He had noticed that since sundown, the wind had changed and was blowing stiffly toward the sea. The sail had filled and the timbers below deck groaned and shifted under the strain.

If the galley had not buried its bow too deeply into the sand bar, the wind might force it back into deeper water. He considered this, and realized that he knew little of how it could be controlled, even if such good fortune came to him.

He wandered around the deck at the high stern of the craft, remembering that these galleys were built in this manner so that they might run before a high wind without being pooped by a large wave.

The steering rudder was simple enough. A long tiller was connected to it, so that one man might, in a fairly calm sea, steer the galley.

Satisfied that he was ready, should the wind work in his favor, Rigger waited for it to freshen. Below him, the groaning timbers told him that the galley was trying to break free. The keel shifted occasionally, throwing the deck over at a sharp angle.

Still, no sign of a complete separation from the bar was evident. Rigger was growing angry at his own helplessness. It might be better to depend on a raft. If the wind didn't grow powerful during the night, he could drift away from the island before daybreak. He started to work, and in an hour had constructed a fair-sized raft from timbers and casks he found about the wrecked deck.

He managed to work the raft across the deck to a spot where he could tip it into the water. There wasn't a drop of food or fresh water with which to provision it.

The wind increased while he worked on the raft, and he hurried back to the tiller, ready to work the rudder around and straighten his course. The

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galley remained fast in the sand.

It must have been close to midnight. Rigger stood in the light of an overcast moon, leaning dejectedly on the tiller. Then his heart skipped a beat.

Something—someone—moved, farther down the deck.

He dropped out of sight behind an empty cask. He could see them clearly now. Two bird-women were standing there. They seemed to sense his presence, yet he was sure they hadn't seen him. How had he missed them? They must have been in the hold, enjoying the night in their own manner. He shivered.

There was more anger than fear in his body. White-hot anger that chased horror and fear from him and made him want to put these two creatures through torture to avenge Santo.

Yet he knew he could not hope to face them without a weapon and stand a chance of living.

The hold. There were whips there. Whips that had cut and torn at his own flesh. He started to creep cautiously along the deck. The women had gone to the rail. They were muttering to each other apparently reluctant to leave the galley. Rigger thought he could guess why. There were more dead men below deck.

He must allow nothing to stop him now. He reached the ladder, and went down it swiftly. At the same time a gust of wind hit the ship and it lurched back and slid into deep water. At once he felt the full force of the wind as it filled the sail and drove the galley out to sea.

He started to search in the darkness, as he remembered where the whips had been hung on hooks beneath the benches. His fingers closed around a thick handle and he grasped it firmly in his right hand.

Here was power. It felt good in his palm. He had seen the things handled and knew how to swing one for the best results.

But now the galley was swinging around wildly with no one to control its direction. He had to get back to the tiller. To right the ship and put open water between him and the island.

RIGGER reached the top of the ladder and breathed deeply of the fresh air. The bird-women were running up and down near the shore side of the ship. Their screams of fright made him grin. They didn't like to see their precious island fading away.

Rigger wasn't afraid now. He reached the tiller and threw his weight against it. The wind blew his hair out straight and whipped against his naked body. Slowly the ship came around and put its high stern against the growing waves.

Then he knew that the women had seen him. They were deathly silent, puzzled. They moved toward him cautiously, forgetting their own plight, knowing only that a man was near them. He pretended not to notice.

The first was only ten feet away now, slinking along in the darkness. His hand gripped the whip handle and he tensed for the blow. Rigger pivoted and a snarl of hate parted his lips. His right arm bulged as the whip snapped out and wrapped around the knees of the bird-woman. The lash cracked like a rifle shot, winding around and around the skinny, scaly legs.

He pulled it toward him with all his weight and she fell to the deck. The lash unrolled and came back to him. The scream of the bird-woman didn't effect him as the whip darted out again and sang around her neck. Her scream was cut short as life jerked out of her.

He drew the whip back slowly, star-

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ing down at the body on the deck. All emotion was drained out of him. He had not murdered. He had cleansed the world of something corrupt and unspeakable.

The other bird-woman retreated swiftly to the shadows of the cabins.

"That's for Santo," Rigger said unsteadily. "And for Acko Sideon and his men."

He couldn't leave the tiller, or he would have pursued the other flesh-eating monster. Each time he turned away, the rudder twisted over and the galley started to turn broadside to the wind.

The moon was gone now and the sky was black. The other woman made no attempt to attack him. She stood a short way down the deck, her wolfish, burning eyes on him. She clutched some small object in her hand. He strained his eyes to see what she was holding.

She held the magic apple Rigger had found floating on the sea.

But how had she gotten it? Then he remembered that he had been stripped of his clothing when he came aboard Sideon's ship. The apple was in his pocket. She had found it while looting the ship.

Suddenly Rigger knew that he must have that apple. It had saved him once before, and brought him into this world of the past. Perhaps it would take him out again. But how could he get it?

The wind had turned into a gale and the sea frothed and whipped at the sides of the galley. As long as it ran with the wind, the galley would remain afloat. If he left the tiller, the ship would twist around and be swamped almost at once. The woman kept her distance. She was trying to eat the metal apple. He saw her grimace when she found it was only an imitation.

Yet she continued to nibble at it, not realizing that it was of no use to her.

The storm grew steadily worse. Rigger clung to the tiller grimly. He had little time to note the bird-woman's movements, and he shuddered to think what would happen if she attacked now. An hour passed and the woman left her spot near the cabin and moved toward the rail. Half-way across the deck, she slipped and slid to the rail. This time, making her way slowly to safety, she was satisfied to remain near the cabin.

RIGGER had never been to sea before the trip from New York to Sicily. Yet he fought the sea with a cunning born of desperation. The galley groaned and cracked under the force of the waves, and he expected it to fall apart at any moment. The sky broke wide open and sheets of rain poured down, a slanting, driving mass of blinding water. He could no longer see the bird-woman. His thoughts persisted in going back to the magic apple. It had been floating on a stormy sea, and when he grasped it, the sea became calm.

He had heard such weird terms as *time-travel,* but no machine had been involved in his case. Perhaps war conditions, the heavy guns for instance, had broken open some sort of pocket in time and he had fallen through. Regardless of how he came here, the apple had kept him safe.

He had to get it back.

Fate had thrown it within his grasp once more, and as the storm grew wilder, he thought he could guess why. The galley was almost out of control. Rain formed a blanket of white that pounded down on the deck. In the darkness, huge waves lashed over the cabin and the woodwork around him glis-

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tened, cleansed by the fury of the storm. There were no ropes near with which he could lash the tiller in place. It might be possible to use the whip for a rope, but he needed it to protect him.

Yet he had to get that apple, and get it before a wave threw him overboard. They were almost large enough now to swallow the galley in one gulp. He'd have to take a chance of getting the apple and returning to the tiller before the ship foundered.

Rigger dropped the tiller and dodged as it swung toward him. He ran swiftly down the deck, lost his balance, came up on his knees and started to crawl on his hands and knees. A wave almost took him overboard, but he dug his fingers into a crack in the planking, and held on until it was gone.

He saw the bird-woman disappear down the hatch into the hold. He reached the ladder, gripped the whip handle in his teeth and dropped.

Here it was dark as a cave. The timbers groaned like living things. He was on guard. Somewhere down here the spurred feet were waiting to kill him. Driven forward by the urgency of finding the apple, he felt his way toward the front of the hold. The ship rolled dangerously under him.

He started to run. He saw a movement to his right and turned, balancing carefully as the ship lurched over. The bird-woman ran toward him, partly hidden in the darker shadows of the benches. The lurching ship made her miss him by inches. Before she could regain her feet, Rigger lashed out with all his force. He heard her cry of pain and saw the whip wrap around her neck. She fell, but the whip slipped away before it choked the life from her.

Rigger went toward her warily. She still clutched the apple. He reached for it and she struck him with her other hand. Blood streamed from his face where she had clawed him. A startling, eager cry escaped her lips. She had drawn his blood.

"You damned vampire!" he howled.

He tried again, this time getting a firm grip on the apple. Her foot shot out and caught him in the chest. Blood shot from the deep wound that resulted.

The ship trembled from bow to stern, struck something strong and unyielding and broke wide open.

Rigger toppled backward, but in his hand he held the magic apple. His head hit something that sent his mind reeling into inpenetrable blackness. . . .

"BADLY wounded man here," a dull, expressionless voice said. "Bring up a stretcher."

Rigger groaned and tried to go back to sleep. He heard more voices, and gradually they began to make sense. They came closer and were full of meaning. It was like coming out from under ether.

"This man's been hit in the chest. He needs first aid. The Germans must have left him behind. Someone stole his clothing."

Rigger felt someone prying an object out of his hand. He rolled over on his stomach. He opened his eyes and closed them again tightly. Then he tried to struggle to his kness but the sun against the cobble-stone street blinded him.

"What the hell's wrong with those Red Cross men?" someone said. "Hey, Private, come over here."

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

Rigger's mind was growing clearer now. He wasn't on the galley. Somehow he had escaped and was lying in the middle of a street. Soldiers were around him. Gun-fire sounded in the distance.

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"Private Donald Rance, sir," a voice said.

"Run back to the corner of the last block," said the first voice. "Tell those first aid men to come on the double. We need——"

"Rigger—Bill Rigger!"

"Do you know this man?"

Rance dropped to his knees and turned Rigger over gently.

"*Know* him, sir? My God, yes. He was blown——"

Rigger opened his eyes and started to grin weakly.

"—blown to Italy on the same boat you were, wasn't I, Don?"

Rance realized what he had been about to say. He controlled his voice carefully.

"That's right," he said in a puzzled voice. "I thought you were a goner."

"Now that your friend's safe," the lieutenant said. "You'd better get help."

Rance stood up quickly.

"Right away," he said.

Rigger lay very still after they were gone. The sun was hot on his face. The wound didn't hurt much. The sound of a rattling machine gun came sporadically from the next corner. In the distance the heavy guns thundered and a lone plane wheeled around in the cloudless sky overhead.

He heard footsteps approaching and tried to smile as they rolled him on the stretcher. It was like coming home again, just to see his own kind of people.

"AND that's the story," Rigger concluded. "I can't blame you for laughing at it. It isn't the kind of yarn that a fellow would tell his commanding officer."

Don Rance stood up and walked to the foot of the hospital cot. They were on the second floor of a small Italian bank. The sun shone in glassless windows. A row of cots had been placed down the center of the room. A nurse was talking to a shell-shock case near the door.

Rance returned and sat down beside Rigger. Bill Rigger felt good in the clean hospital gown. He looked so supremely contented that Rance almost wished he could change places with him.

"I'll admit it's a bed-time story," Rance said. "And told with more than the usual amount of imagination."

Rigger nodded sourly.

"I couldn't expect you to—— "

"But I believe it," Rance went on calmly. "I'm forced to."

Rigger stared up at him, unable to speak.

"Because yesterday," Rance continued, "I took that metal apple away from you. Before that, I figured that somehow you had managed to swim ashore and had been living with the Italians."

Rigger nodded.

"I swam ashore all right," he admitted. "But not where I wanted to."

"Now, about the apple," Rance said. "I thought this morning I was going crazy. You've made me feel better."

"Go on."

"Well, I took that apple up front with me when I went after a Jerry machine-gun nest. It was in my pocket and I forgot it. I was in a bombed building, trying to smoke out some Jerries who had a sand-bag gun position half-way down the block.

"I tossed a couple of hand grenades, but it didn't move them."

Rance sighed.

"Then for no damned reason at all, the whole street was full of Romans. They were dressed in helmets and ancient battle clothing. Honest to God, Bill, I could have died on the spot. I

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tell you, this war is breaking down some time barriers that may effect the entire world. The hellish explosions of our big guns are cracking time wide open."

"But the Romans," Rigger asked. "What happened?"

Rance grinned broadly.

"They kept coming toward me," he admitted. "I was in their way and I knew I'd soon be a fresh slice of beef. I reached for another grenade and tossed it into the middle of them."

"It worked?"

"Worked?" Rance grinned. "The damned thing exploded like a block-buster. When the smoke cleared, the Romans were gone. So was every last sand bag of that Jerry nest."

Rigger sighed.

"Then the appearance of the Romans convinced you that I'm telling the truth? Is that what did it?"

Rance looked both ways along the row of cots. The nurse was still some distance away.

"The hell it did," he said. "I could have been seeing things. You get batty at times like that."

"Then—what——?"

"The grenade did it," Rance admitted. "I *reached* for a grenade, but somehow I musta forgotten I didn't have any more. The thing I heaved into the street—the grenade that exploded like a block-buster—was that Gad-damned apple of yours.

"The lieutenant says I'll get decorated for cleaning up the machine-gun nest. It seems that it was keeping us from reaching an objective. He doesn't seem to realize that I also wiped out half the entire Roman army."

THE END

★ EXIT MALARIA—WITH ATABRINE ★

NO MAJOR military operations by the United States would be possible in most quarters of the globe except for the ingenuity of American chemists.

American scientists have triumphantly opened a front against a sinister enemy that must be whipped before we can defeat the Japs and Germans. In every tropic and subtropic war zone, the bayonets of countless billions of mosquitoes lurk to stab our fighting men with malaria, the plague that yearly saps the strength of 800,000,000 and kills an estimated 3,500,000 people.

When the Japs conquered the East Indies, they cut us off from quinine, specific remedy for this scourge. Surgeon General Parron of the United States Public Health Service had stated that no major military operations were possible in the tropics "without quinine or the equally potent German synthetic, Atabrine." Though our supply of natural quinine was blocked at the source, we were already producing sufficient quantities of Atabrine.

It was magical the way Atabrine brought the worst malaria sufferers back from the grave. From many pestholes came reports that doctors no longer feared the fatal form of malaria. The Germans tried Atabrine out experimentally in Rumania, Italy, Spain, Africa and the East Indies. Back came a roaring yes of scientific approval. With the new drug one could live in health despite swarms of deadly malaria mosquitoes. It was a German monopoly, a master weapon, and now Hitler's "Wehrmacht" was ready and rarin' to go.

But at this point the German dye trust made its error. The Germans sold the secret of Atabrine to America. They thought they were driving a sharp bargain, because they deliberately omitted vital pieces of the chemical jigsaw puzzle of the synthesis of Atabrine. Dr. A. E. Sherndal of the Winthrop Chemical Company knew what the missing ingredients were, but could not obtain them in the United States. He therefore devised a process of making Atabrine by using available American materials, and produced a medicine identical with the German chemical.

The American high command knows that Atabrine will keep our boys on their feet and fighting, wherever they may be. Millions of pills have been flown to Brazil, to make possible successful rubber production in the malaria-infected jungle.

Thanks to Atabrine, this fiendish disabler can now be wiped out, if we have the will to try. And we shall meet at least part of our obligation toward reconstruction by producing and distributing millions of yellow pills of Atabrine that will eventually conquer malaria.

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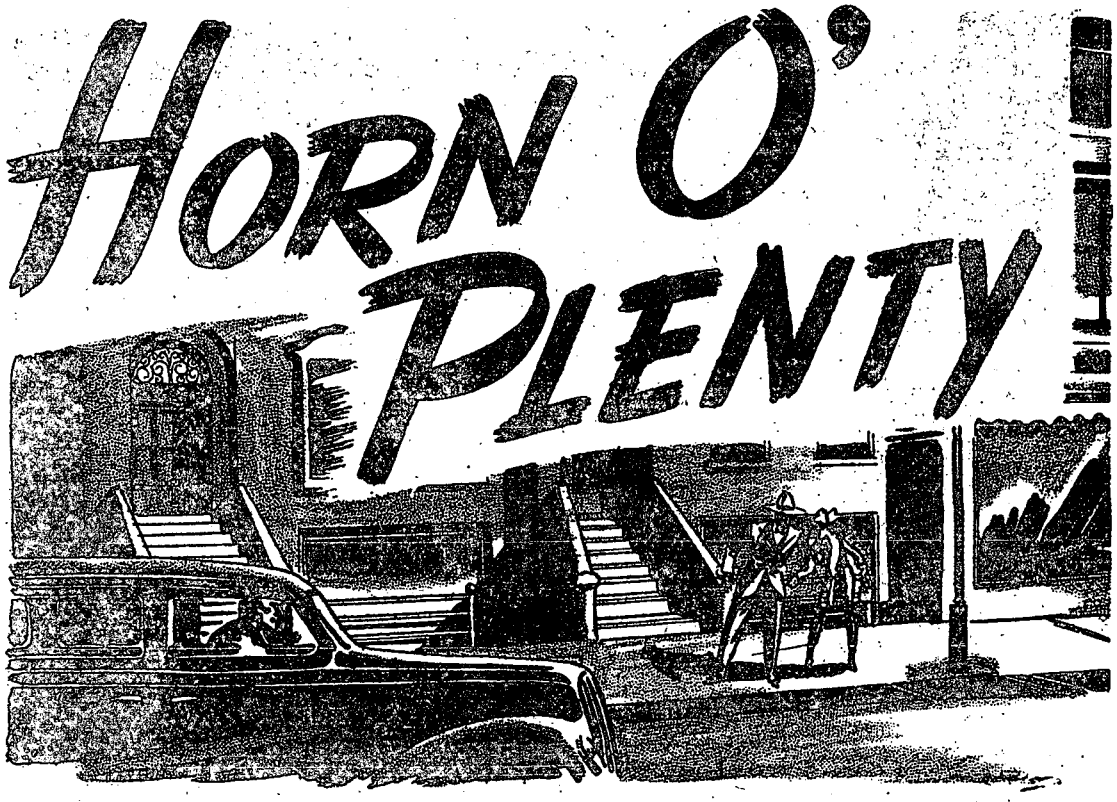
HORN O' PLENTY



ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT FUQUA

BY RICHARD CASEY

Musical car horns are all right—in their place. But when one takes a man's job away from him, it's time for action!

"HOT-LIPS" JOHNSON walked lazily out of Casey's Dance Palace, his trumpet dangling from his right hand, perspiration standing out on his black forehead. The parking lot was dusty and hot under a July Harlem moon. Hot-Lips stared around him, trying to find company for the few minutes he planned to rest. Inside, the boys were "grooving it on down" with the *Two-O'clock Jump*. Hot-Lips snapped his fingers in rhythm with the music, and wandered toward the street.

"That you, Johnson?"

Hot-Lips stopped in his tracks, swayed around with the music and stared behind him. His eyes twinkled.

"How come I didn' see you when I stepped out?"

Charlie Washington, a little out of bounds in his tight trousers and sweat shirt, grinned from ear to ear.

"Guess I and my old horn was listenin' to the jive hounds in there," he admitted. "Ol' horn kinda likes jive."

Hot-Lips looked puzzled.

"What you talking 'bout, tall, dark

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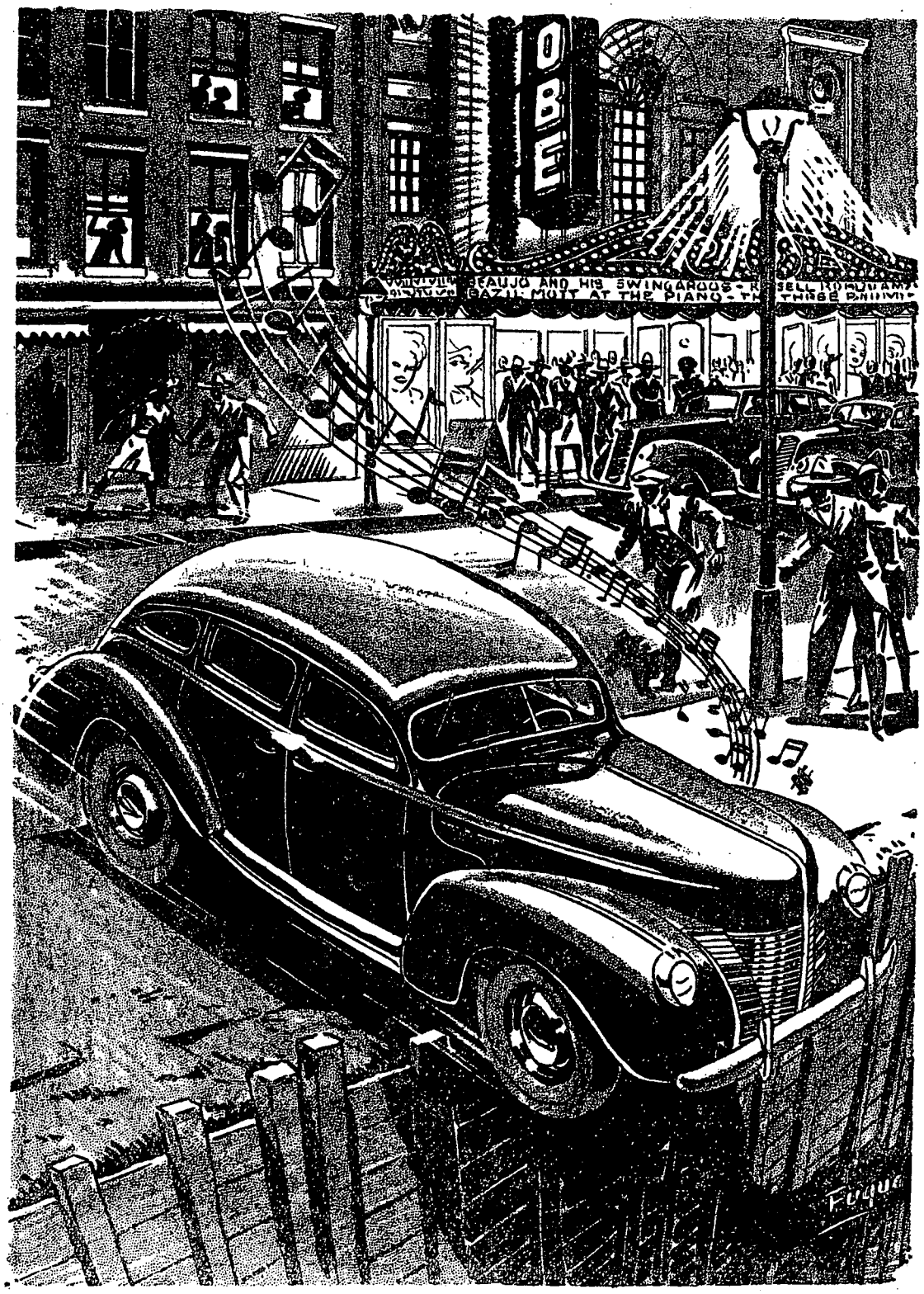

To the strains of "My Last Goodbye," the sedan disappeared from view

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and handsome? What horn you talking 'bout?"

Charlie Washington backed toward his Ford that was parked under the window.

"My bugle-horn, of course," he said "Me, I got one of them bugle-horns on the car. Shore does like music."

Hot-Lips was a little worried about Charlie's condition.

"Ain't no horn can listen to music," he said. "You're crazy as a skeeter-bug."

Charlie Washington frowned.

"Ain't neither," he protested. "This ol' bugle-horn just listens to music and plays it all by itself."

In spite of himself, Hot-Lips was growing interested. He followed Charlie Washington, and together they lifted the hood on the Ford. Underneath was the shining horn. It had four trumpets.

"This here horn used to play just one tune," Charlie Washington said dolefully. "Just the first few notes of *Bugle Call Rag*. Shore got tiresome."

"Go on," Hot-Lips said. "You ain't telling me it can play *more* than that now?"

Charlie Washington nodded.

"Been playing right along with you all evening," he claimed seriously. "Can't quite decide which one of you is hottest."

That was a personal slam against the best trumpet man in Harlem. Hot-Lips backed away slowly, his fingers itching for competition.

"How long dis horn been playing like me?"

Charlie Washington looked thoughtful.

"First time was at the carnival," he said. "Ol' horn just ripped off some notes from the merry-go-round, then stopped. Tell you, I was some surprised."

"I should think," Hot-Lips agreed. "How 'bout a little jam session just so's I can make sure?"

Charlie Washington looked pleased.

"Sho' would be somethin'!" he agreed. "Now, I'd like to hear you two take off on the *Two-O'clock Jump!*"

Hot-Lips Johnson was grinning. He polished his beloved trumpet on his sleeve, lifted it in the air and placed his lips to the mouth-piece.

"Give!" Charlie Washington begged.

Hot-Lips gave!

IN ALL Harlem there was no other playing like that. At his lips, the trumpet became something fit for Gabriel to rave about. When he ran up and down the scale, every curly-headed baby in the district climbed out of its cradle and got ready to cut a rug.

The first bell-like notes escaped Hot-Lips trumpet. Inside Casey's dance hall the band stopped playing. A hush fell over everyone. Johnson was doing a solitary jam session. Man, *that* was something to stop the world for!

But what was the other sound? There couldn't be anyone in Harlem who had the nerve to stand up to Hot-Lips?

As the crowd drifted to the doors and windows, staring out at the dusky figures in the parking lot *two* trumpets started to work together.

At first, the second one was a little fuzzy. Then it caught up with Hot-Lips and started to put in the licks that Johnson missed.

In five minutes the crowd at Casey's was swaying, punch-drunk. In ten minutes a first class contest was going on, and Hot-Lips was sweating to keep up. In a half hour the story was all over town.

Charlie Washington had bought a bugle-horn that could keep pace with the best rhythm-man in town.

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From then on, the story grew like the immortal bean-stalk. Charlie Washington, worth two-bits and not a cent more, had become famous. Every boy in the neighborhood bought a horn and tried to work it out on the trumpet of Hot-Lips Johnson. *That* rhythm man fell in love with Charlie's car and offered him twice what it was worth just so he'd have the horn around when he felt a spell coming on.

IT NEVER occured to anyone that the horn might someday out-play Hot-Lips himself.. Johnson played his best, and he played often. The horn seemed to listen and learn. Once in a while it knocked off a tune or two when Johnson wasn't around.

Then Hot-Lips went to Albany for a week, to play with Jan Strutter's Hot Numbers, and Charlie's Ford got a contract at Casey's Dance Palace.

They say there was never anything funnier in Harlem than the sight of Charlie Washington's old Ford, its hood pushed up, squatting there in the brass section. They say that nothing Hot-Lips Johnson ever produced could equal the quality and tone that the bugle-horn turned out.

Harlem came and saw and paid homage. The cats were wild for more. Major Bowes made an offer and Charlie turned it down. He was happy at Casey's.

Then Hot-Lips came back from his week, ready to accept the cheers of the crowd he expected at the station. He wandered around to Casey's that night with an almost pale expression on his face. His pep was gone. His job was gone. Casey's Rhythm Cats didn't need him any more. He had been replaced by the machine age. Canned music, played by a bugle-horn, and contained in the rattling body of a decrepit Ford.

If Johnson had been a better man, he might have stuck it out. Instead, it drove him to cheap dance halls, and increased his yen for raw whiskey. He got a little short of cash and joined up with Spike Howard's gang of hoodlums.

Spike was plenty smart. He sent Johnson out on a couple of small safe-cracking jobs, just to get the feel of things. Then, one night, he sent for Johnson and met him behind the gambling room at Casey's Dance Palace.

Spike had been in every crooked deal he could find since his Mammy first tossed him into the street. He had a scar on his cheek from an old razor fight and he'd been collecting on that scar ever since.

"Look here, Johnson," Spike said, as soon as they could talk alone. "You been working fo' me about two months now. Ain't it time you caught up on yo' *own* homework?"

Johnson scowled.

"What you talking 'bout?"

Spike grinned and it made the scar glow as though it were bleeding.

"This Charlie Washington boy," Spike prompted. "You ain't gonna let him get *away* with what he done, is you?"

Hot-Lips scowled a little harder.

"Ain't nothin' *I* can do, is there?"

"Ain't no reason why you can't *steal* that four-wheeled juke-box?"

Johnson looked startled.

"Never thought of it like that."

Spike pushed a wad of greenbacks across the table.

"I can peddle that jumpin' jive-hound to a guy in Chicago," he said. "You can count one hundred bucks in the hunk of dough. You deliver that four-wheeled trumpet to the freight siding down near my place and the *money is yo's.*"

Johnson brightened.

"You can also get your ol' job back

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with Casey," Spike said, adding the clinching touch.

Johnson stood up slowly, and when he went out, the money was clenched tightly in his big hand.

IT MIGHT have worked, too. He might have succeeded in stealing Charlie Washington's Ford if he had disconnected the horn before he drove it out of Casey's Dance Palace.

But the horn objected.

Casey's was deserted at four o'clock. Hot-Lips Johnson managed to back the Ford out the rear door and get as far as the street.

What happened after that is history in Harlem.

The trumpet horns started to bleat the minute they reached the street. It was terrible.

First came the *Bugle Call Rag.*

"You can't get 'em up,
You can't get 'em up,
You can't get 'em up this morning."

High and shrill came the warning in Harlem's deserted streets.

Windows flew open and lights went on. Heads poked out the windows and started a cry of protest.

Johnson, driving as fast as the car would go, felt sweat pop out on his forehead.

The horn was silent for only an instant after finishing the last notes of the *Rag.* Then, evidently becoming playful, it imitated a police siren for five blocks and worked from that right into a heart-breaking rendition of *It's Murder, He Says.*

By this time, Johnson had gone completely wild. He cut across lots between a couple of apartment buildings.

As he emerged on the street again, holding fiercely to the wheel, the horns broke into the sad, mournful strains of *In The Hush Of Evening.*

That was too much.

Hot-Lips Johnson cleared the door and fell headlong into the street. By this time a crowd had collected on the sidewalk. The Ford didn't stop rolling. It rounded the next corner and sped down between the lines of men and women who filled the sidewalks.

There are those who will swear that as it neared the building excavation on the next corner, those trumpets were dolefully swinging out with *My Last Goodbye.*

It *was* a fact that the deep excavation was half filled with water. The Ford didn't hesitate, but plunged straight through the fence and tipped end over end into ten feet of muddy water.

A howl of sadness arose and swelled until it reached the outskirts of Harlem.

The last tune that Charlie Washington's bugle-horn ever played, was beating shrilly against the night as the Ford plunged toward the water.

"And so help me," Charlie Washington said afterward, with tears in his eyes, "that ol' Ford was tooting *Taps* just as it went under."

SOMEHOW, when it was all over, no one had the heart to punish Hot-Lips Johnson. He hung around Casey's for a long time, pleading with Charlie Washington for forgiveness. Perhaps Charlie felt that he hadn't been entirely fair with Hot-Lips. Anyway, after a few weeks, Hot-Lips was back in the band. His trumpet was sweeter than ever, but he never played again within hearing distance of a bugle-horn.

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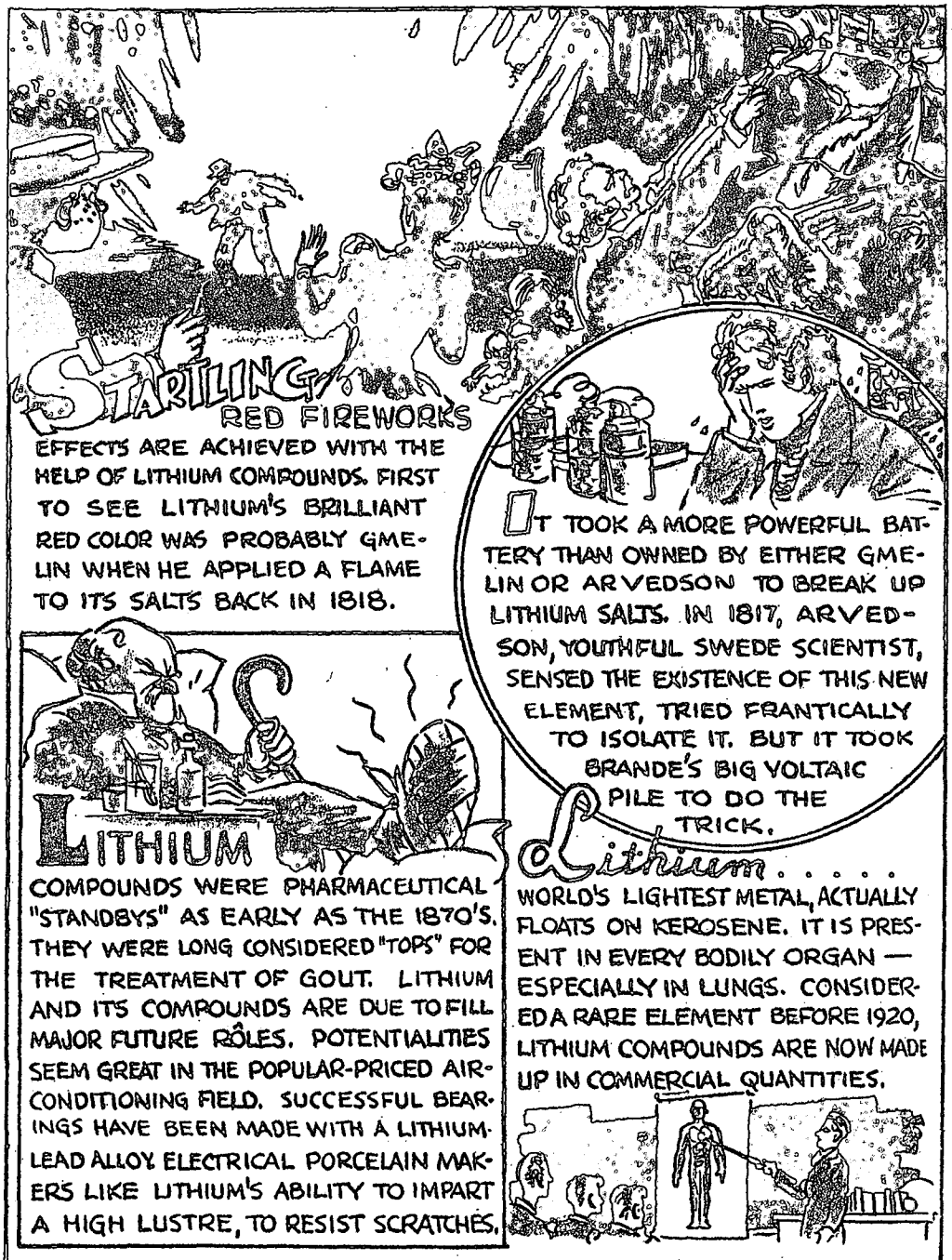
ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS—LITHIUM



LITHIUM is number 3 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Li and its atomic weight is 6.940. Its density is 0.534, its melting point is 186.0°, its boiling point is 1400.0°. It is one of the alkali metals; has a positive valence of one. It is a light metal, soft and malleable, will float on water; is one of the most active of metals . . . but least active of the alkali metals. Its practical uses are mostly medicinal.

(NEXT ISSUE: The Romance of Palladium)

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Against the sweep of the desert sky the spirits of a restless band of Roman legionnaires led them to battle

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CURSE OF THE PHANTOM LEGION

By Helmar Lewis

It was the ancient curse of a long-dead Christian martyr that led to a miracle in the battle for Libya

"DO YOU expect to live forever?" Casca hollered at the Christian martyr. He shoved the point of his spear into the martyr's back so that the man sprawled to the tan-bark on all fours.

"Make him crawl into the lion's arena!" another Roman legionnaire cried.

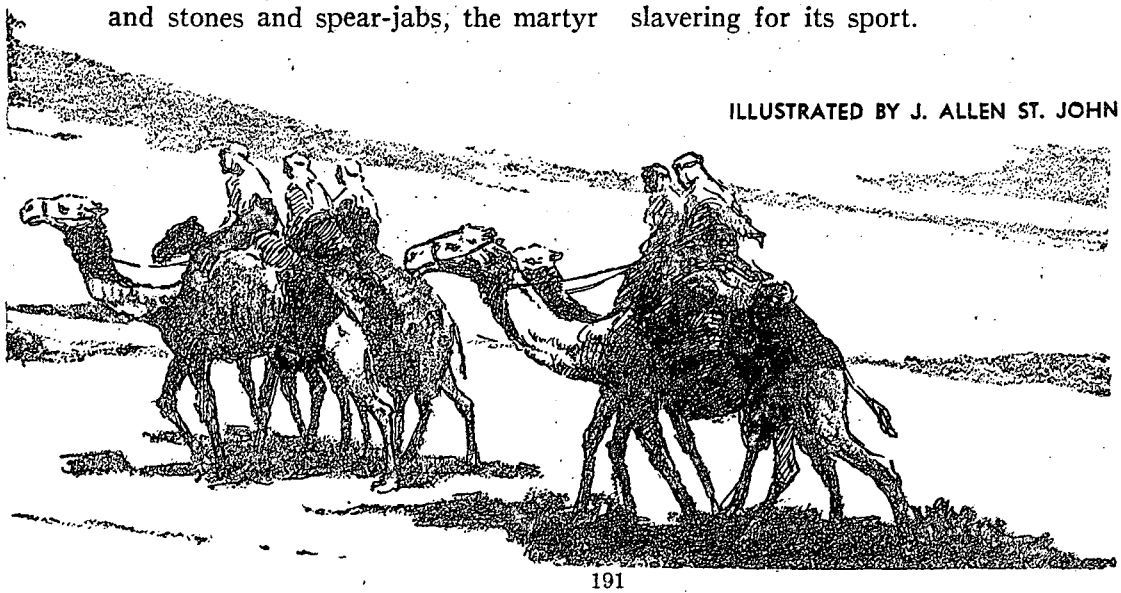
The other legionnaires roared in laughter at the discomfiture of the martyr. Some of them spat at him while others threw stones at his head.

But, in spite of the hail of curses and stones and spear-jabs, the martyr stood up from the tan-bark, threw back his shoulders proudly and stared at his tormenters. His wild matted hair stood out from his head like wiry snakes. His dark eyes smoldered in shadowed eye-sockets with intense hatred. His red beard quivered as he spoke.

"I call down a curse on all of you!" he screamed.

His words brought another sally of laughter. The roar of a hungry lion came to their ears. The gates had been opened. The wild beasts had entered the arena and the Roman populace was slavering for its sport.

ILLUSTRATED BY J. ALLEN ST. JOHN



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"Feed him to the lions!" the legionnaire Casca hollered. He nudged the martyr with the tip of his spear. "Get going, you!" he said, "the lions are waiting for you!"

"May the curse of heaven dog you for all the days of your life and death!" the martyr continued as the spear-points of the other legionnaires backed him up to the door that opened into the arena. "May your filthy souls wander after death between heaven and hell, lost! lost! May you never know the solace of rest after death! May you all linger on earth, even after death, when your bodies are dust and your spirits have left the dust, lost! lost! And not until you have come to the aid of other Christians, like myself, should you receive the blessed release of life after death! Not until then should your wandering, lost souls find their haven!"

"Yah!" one of the legionnaires called out. He lunged forward with his spear and pushed the martyr through the door that another legionnaire had opened. "Feed your worthless curses to the lions!"

The door was hastily shut behind the martyr. And as the legionnaires made their way up the ramp to the upper deck, so that they could watch the fun, they heard a wild scream issue from the arena.

"That's what the lions think of his curses!" Casca said to his friend Tulla.

"His curse was ominous!" Tulla replied.

"Are you afraid of a martyr's empty curse?" Casca demanded. "You, a soldier of the glorious Roman empire?"

"These martyrs, they say, have strange powers!"

"Don't be stupid!" Casca replied. "This is the year 250. That stuff about curses is all old-fashioned bunk. We don't believe in those superstitions any more."

But Tulla was not reassured. "I don't know," he said dubiously. "The next Christian I see, I'm going to try and help him and get rid of the curse!"

"But the Emperor Decius has issued an edict saying that the martyrs are to be persecuted!" Casca insisted.

"An edict is a piece of parchment!" Tulla replied, "but a martyr's curse . . ." He shuddered as he left the sentence unspoken.

A few days after the fun at the arena, the Fifth Company of Roman Legionnaires, to which Casca and Tulla belonged, was sent to a small village, near Byrsa, where a tribe of native marauders had rebelled against the Roman rule. The entire company of Romans was ambushed. They were all killed and horribly mutilated. And there, on the plain, their bodies fell among the green cactus. And only the green lizards, crawling through the eye-sockets of the whitened bones, knew that they had died. Only the green lizards and the Christian martyr whom they had taunted and pushed out to the lions.

From that day on, the Arabs refused to travel through the district. Instead, they would skirt the plain to get to their destinations.

"The dead have not yet died," they would say.

And, sometimes, when an unlucky traveler passed across the plain at night, he would hear the mournful wails of departed spirits. And he would push his camel to its utmost so as to get away as fast as possible. And as they lurched through the night, they would hear a keening, as of dying souls, riding with the wind at their backs.

THE twelve American soldiers slithered noiselessly through the high grass. Occasionally their leader, Lieutenant Jack Sidall, would raise his

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head to survey the land that lay ahead. Finally, they reached the top of a small hill. The lieutenant gathered his men around him.

"Take a look down into the valley across the plain," he said.

The men looked.

"Geez!" one of them said under his breath.

Far in the haze of distance, they could see the red tiled roofs and the gilded minarets of mosques gleaming in the rays of the setting sun.

"That's Tunis!" the lieutenant said.

"Just like Coney Island!" Sergeant Mulroy said. He turned to the lieutenant. "What's in the cards now, Lieutenant?" he asked.

"That depends on what the Germans know," was the reply. "If they suspect that we're here, I can promise you a pretty hot time."

"And if they don't?" one of the men asked.

"Then we'll do the job we were sent out to do. The general attack," he explained, "is going to take place at five tomorrow morning. We're behind the German lines now and it's our job to mine the roads, so that they can't retreat, and to blow up whatever bridges we can find. In other words," he concluded, "we're here to make it as tough for the Germans as we can!"

"How much further we got to go?" Sergeant Mulroy asked.

The lieutenant pointed to a white road threading through the valley and the plain that lay ahead. "There's the road," he said. "We should reach it at about nine o'clock this evening."

"When do we eat?"

"As soon as we hit the road!"

There was some grumbling from the men, a good-natured kind of grumbling. But they tightened their belts, shifted their packs and, when the lieutenant gave the order, followed him once more through the high grass, snaking their way along noiselessly.

They reached their objective at about nine o'clock. There, in a clump of palm trees, the lieutenant gave them the order to fall out. After freeing themselves of the heavy packs they had been carrying, they opened their K-ration packs and ate the concentrated foods and chocolate.

"No smoking!" the lieutenant warned. "We'll start to mine the road at about midnight. Better get the mines unpacked. You've all been given your job and I want no noise. Until then, and only after you've gotten everything ready, you can do what you want. But you've got to stay here. The least indication to the Germans that we're here—and we're goners. Not only that but we will have failed in our mission and there'll be hell to pay when the attack starts tomorrow. That's all."

"We can do what we want!" one of the men grumbled to Sergeant Mulroy. "What the hell is there for us to do but lay here and twiddle our thumbs."

"You can think about that Mamie dame you left in Wauwatosa!" the sergeant grunted. He left the group of men and snaked over to where the lieutenant was seated alone.

"You're kind of worried, sir, aren't you?" he said.

"Kind of," the lieutenant replied. "It's been too damned quiet around here to suit me. I thought we'd at least come across a couple of Heinie patrols. You'd think they'd have sense enough to protect their rear. But so far there's been nothing. It isn't like the Germans to do that. I'm afraid they've got something up their sleeves."

"Like what?"

"Like letting us walk into a trap."

"You mean we're in it now?"

"Yes—and it's liable to be sprung any minute."

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THE sergeant rubbed his week-old beard. "It wouldn't be so bad if there was a moon out," he said. "Me, I like to see what's comin' at me when it starts to come."

The lieutenant remained quiet for a long time. Finally, he said, "This part of the country has seen a helluva lot of fighting, Sergeant."

"Yeah?"

"Between the old Romans and the Carthaginians. There was the battle of Metaurus, in 207 B.C. That was when Nero defeated the army of Hasdrubal and took over North Africa as part of the Roman Empire."

"They were the old Eyetalians, huh?"

"That's right."

"The same guys we took Libya away from, huh?"

"The same guys. The native guides told me, before I left the base, that this old battlefield is haunted."

The sergeant looked around into the darkness. "Haunted, you say, huh?"

"There's an old legend," the lieutenant said, "about a company of Roman soldiers that was ambushed by the natives hundreds of years ago. And the story is that the soldiers were killed but they didn't die."

"What kind of tripe is that?"

"That's the story," the lieutenant said. "Seems that a Christian martyr they'd thrown to the lions put a curse on them and told them that, although they'd all be killed, none of them would die until they helped a Christian in distress."

"The bunk, huh?" The sergeant spat on the ground. "Why, back in Brooklyn, I remember there was a haunted house once, and——" He stopped short suddenly. A low moan, as of a howling wolf or a dying dog, came to his ears.

"What was that?" he said.

The lieutenant listened closely. The moan was repeated. He looked up to the tops of the palm trees swaying high overhead.

"Might be the wind," he said.

They listened together this time. Again the moan was repeated. One by one, the other men began to crawl up to where they were seated.

"I don't like it!" the lieutenant said. "Have your guns ready for action. Set up the machine guns. Michaels and Foster, stand guard fifty paces from camp. Report any suspicious occurrence immediately."

The two soldiers crawled away to their posts. The others remained sprawled around the lieutenant and the sergeant. They lay on the ground, bodies tensed with apprehension. They heard a rustling of the grass in the distance and hoped it was only the two men who had been put on guard duty.

Then it happened. Suddenly, from the distance, they heard the muffled report of cannon fire. Then came the whistle and whine of shells followed by the ominous crump of their explosions as they landed some distance away.

"The Heinies!" the sergeant grunted.

"They're wise!" the lieutenant said. "The trap's being sprung!"

"What'll we do?"

"What we came here to do!" the lieutenant said grimly. Quietly he called the men together again. Around them, getting closer and closer, as the artillerymen began to find the range, the shells landed with tumultuous explosions, rocking the earth so that the ground shook underfoot.

"You men have all got your orders!" he commanded. "I want you to follow them. The sappers to do the mining, the others to cover them. We'll work back on the road as far as the mines last. After that, we'll have to

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see what'll happen!"

ONE by one, the men crawled away from the group, some snaking their way to the road which lay about twenty feet ahead, while others set up their tommy-guns in readiness for an attack. And as the sappers completed their job of laying a mine, they would pace off a few feet and lay another one, each time being followed by the men at the tommy-guns.

All this time, the shells continued to burst around them. One of the sappers fell with a shell splinter in his thigh. A covering man lifted him up and bandaged the leg. It was only a slight flesh wound, and in a few minutes the sapper was back on the road again, working with the mines.

After some time the sappers reported that they had laid all their mines. Gathering his men together, the lieutenant found that none of them had been seriously wounded. He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock. It still lacked an hour before the attack was scheduled to begin. He still had an hour in which he could mine the bridge over the gully. But the shells were continuing to fall about them in deadly monotony. The barrage had not let up during the entire time. The Germans were out to annihilate them completely.

"We'll take care of the bridge," he told his men quietly. He hated to tell them. As he looked around at their faces, he saw that they were all dog-tired. But they had their job to do. Quickly he assigned jobs to each of the men. And then, with the shells bursting around them hellishly, they made their way to the deep gorge over which the suspension bridge had been thrown. With a practiced eye, Lieutenant Sidall surveyed the structure, noting carefully where the TNT charges would do the most good. He decided to lay them at the extreme end, connected with land mines. That would mean that if the retreating army tried to cross the bridge, the forward elements would set the charges just when the entire bridge was loaded with men and machines.

It took half an hour for the men to complete the job. When it was done, they returned to their original positions. The shells were still falling in intermittent barrages. It was obvious to the lieutenant that their way of escape was being consistently shelled. The Germans knew exactly where they were and their only means of getting out.

Once more he brought his tired men around him. "Looks bad," he told them. "They've got our line of retreat pretty well covered with the barrage. But it's our only way back to our own lines. If we try it, some of us might get through. Most of us won't, I'm sure."

"It's a cinch we can't stay here," the sergeant said.

"Then let's us get going!" came from one of the men.

"Only a miracle can save us," the lieutenant said. Then, gathering his pack together, he slung it over his back and started off the way they had come. The sergeant followed close to the rear of him with the others strung out behind.

AROUND them, the crump and crunch of exploding shells burst like a battle in hell. Ahead of them, getting closer and closer as they inched forward, a seeming curtain of shells burst in hellish unison. Only when they had approached it as closely as possible did the lieutenant stop. The sergeant continued forward until he came to where the lieutenant was resting.

"How about it, Lieutenant?"

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"This is it!" the lieutenant replied. "We've done our job. I guess we can thank the Lord for that." He started to crawl forward again. Suddenly he stopped short.

"What's the matter, Lieutenant?" the sergeant asked. He crawled forward hastily. "Are you hit, sir?"

The lieutenant sat up and listened intently to something. "Do you hear what I hear?" he asked.

The sergeant listened. He still heard the sound of the whine and crump of shells. But somehow they seemed to have decreased in intensity.

"They're slowing down," he said.

"That's what I thought."

"What do you make of it?"

"I don't know," the lieutenant replied. "Unless they're running short of shells—or unless they're just getting tired of lobbing them over."

They both sat and listened. Now they were both certain. The intensity of the barrage had lessened considerably. The effect was as though a sniper was ticking off a gunner at each position so that, gradually, the battery was being decimated and its gunfire diminished. Soon only a few guns sporadically boomed and sent over their intermittent shells.

"We can make it!" the lieutenant grinned.

"What happened?" the sergeant asked.

"I don't know!" the lieutenant replied, "but, whatever it was, it was a Godsend to us. Now we can cut through their weak barrage and make it back to our lines!"

Suddenly, before they realized it, the night was silent once more. The last gun had fired its last shell. The quiet was almost repressive, coming so soon after the murderous explosions of the barrage they had just undergone.

"It's stopped!" the sergeant whispered wonderingly, his eyes wide.

"By a miracle!" the lieutenant breathed, almost prayerfully. Then quickly he shushed the sergeant into silence. "Do you hear what I hear?" he asked presently.

The sergeant listened. Again, as though coming from the heavens, he heard what sounded like a faint moan. But this time, instead of sounding ominous and deathly, it had a note of triumph in it.

"Like the sound of English horns coming in on a Wagner scene," the lieutenant explained later.

"It's getting fainter and fainter," the sergeant said. "What the hell is it?"

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders. "Your guess is as good as mine," he said. "Whatever it was, I'm sure it had something to do with holding off that barrage that was going to be sure death to us."

"Spooks?" the sergeant asked.

"Maybe."

"Nuts!" the sergeant replied. "That's all the bunk!" He signalled to the men behind him. "Anyhow, let's us get going while the going's good."

The lieutenant nodded agreement, hitched up his pack behind him and started off again. The sergeant followed and, behind him, the men began to inch forward.

They had looked death in the face. They had lived through it.

THE German field hospital, behind the lines, was loaded with casualties. The two doctors and their orderlies cursed as the men were brought in on stretchers.

"What happened to all the gunners?" the stiff-necked colonel demanded of one of the doctors. "Right in the middle of the barrage that they were laying down, they all started to drop, one by

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one, as if they were being picked off by snipers."

The doctor who was bending over one of the casualties straightened up again. There was a look of puzzlement in his face. His mouth was open, in awe it seemed, and his monocle dropped from his eye.

"What's the matter?" the colonel screamed. "How could they have been shot when we didn't hear a single return shot?"

"They were not shot," the doctor said slowly.

"What nonsense are you talking?" the colonel demanded.

"They were not shot!" the doctor repeated, almost mechanically.

"Then how were they killed?"

The doctor pointed to the gaping wound in the back of the gunner they had just brought in. "Look at that wound," he said. "That's not a gunshot wound."

"What is it, then?" the colonel demanded.

"The same kind of wound all the other gunners had in their backs—a wound inflicted by a sharp, pointed instrument that pierced the heart."

"What kind of an instrument?"

"A spear!"

☆ THE MAGIC OF PENICILLIN ★

THE most exciting story in all medical history is the development of a new drug, penicillin. A year ago it was a laboratory curiosity, known only to a few research men. Today, scientists are convinced that in penicillin they have the most potent weapon ever found against a number of diseases—among them blood poisoning, pneumonia and gonorrhea.

The story of penicillin begins in 1929, when Dr. Alexander Fleming, at work in his University of London laboratory was examining a glass culture plate milky with millions of bacteria. There was a fleck of green mold on the plate, and around this fleck was a halo of clear fluid.

A mold is a low form of vegetable life, a primitive plant. Penicillium is a relative of the green mold in Roquefort cheese. Some substance secreted by this mold was the microbe destroyer.

Dr. Fleming fished out the mold but research on it stood still for ten years. Why this long pause? For one thing, there was little interest at the time in chemotherapy—the cure of disease with chemicals.

Chemists set to work at the tedious task of growing the green mold in earthenware flask. When the mold had grown into a hard, rubbery mat the chemists took over. By a slow process of elimination, the chemists discarded chemical components of the mold that had no antibacterial effect. In the end they turned up with the minutest pinch of a yellow-brown powdery stuff. The first run trials of the yellow powder were run in tests tubes.

Penicillin worked wonders in fighting osteomyelitis and streptococcus infections. Penicillin had great advantages but was incredibly difficult to produce.

In its laboratory at Peoria, Illinois, the Dept. of Agriculture undertook one tremendously important phase of the problem. Researchers discovered that corn steep liquor—a by-product of the starch industry—was a diet which coaxed the mold into increased production. Three large pharmaceutical houses set to work growing the mold and extracting the difficult drug. The three leaders in this work were Merck & Company, E. R. Squibb & Sons, and Charles A. Pfizer and Company.

There was still another problem. Penicillin was the ideal drug for fighting infected war wounds. It would save the lives of gravely injured soldiers when everything else had failed. But military surgeons had to learn how to use it.

Doctors had to learn where the drug would work, how much should be administered, and what method of administration was best. The job of determining these things fell to the National Research Council's Committee on Chemotherapeutics, of which Dr. Chester S. Keefer, Director of the Evans Memorial Hospital in Boston, is chairman. Every gram of penicillin would go to Dr. Keefer and he would pass it along to the 22 hospitals selected for clinical trials.

Supplies of the drug are still small. The Army has already asked for many times as much penicillin as is being produced. Thirteen pharmaceutical houses, in addition to the original three, are planning to help fill this demand. Even with this big increase, there is little likelihood that civilian supplies will be available until after the war.

If chemists can make the drug artificially, large supplies would be immediately available. Present evidence indicates that penicillin is a complex chemical which will be difficult or impossible to synthesize. It is already clear that penicillin is an unparalleled weapon against death, and will ultimately rank as one of the greatest accomplishments ever made by medical research.

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The Earth MUST BE A WOMAN!

Scientists have been asking her age, but she will not speak except evasively. Here are some answers

THE means by which the members of the feminine sex have succeeded in covering the tell-tale marks of age are legendary. Their ingenuity and imagination toward that end are a credit to them and they deserve our commendation for this delightful hoax.

It is remarkable when you consider that science, which does not even have workable theories on this subject, has succeeded in determining the age of many objects which would seem to present a more complex problem. Plants and animals in nature present no problem at all. Fossils which have lain hidden for thousands of years are uncovered, examined, and their life-span placed with amazing accuracy. Marine animals of 50 million years ago, elephants and rhinos of the Ice Ages, footprints of dinosaurs, are all fitted neatly into an historical pattern which, though always subject to logical change and modification, becomes more accurate as time goes on.

The most complex problem involving age, however, that men of science have tackled since they began their search has even today escaped an accurate solution. It is the problem of the age of this planet, the Earth, and what a fascinating enigma it has been. The first theory was offered on the basis of evidence found in the Old Testament. After a great deal of research and mathematical calculations James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, announced in 1654 that the Earth was created at 9 A.M. on October 26th, 4004 B.C. That would make the age of the Earth now 5948 years. Needless to say that estimate proved to be a little low.

When, in the 13th century, there began a series of serious scientific investigations into the problem it became evident that the method adopted would to a great degree determine the result. Each method uncovered new evidence and new proof that made the history of our planet extend into the millions of years. Each method, however, gave way to newer methods in scientific research.

In 1899 the physicist, Joly, arrived at the minimum age for the Earth as 97 million years. His theory assumed that since the seas contained dissolved minerals brought by the rivers flowing down from the land, if we measured the amount of salt —one of the minerals which stays in solution—in the seas, and divided it by the amount of salt brought yearly by these rivers, we could arrive at the age of the oceans. After innumerable analyses of samples and elaborate measurements of streams he reached the conclusion cited above, which later work raised to about 110 million years. Since then we have recognized that, since we live in a time when lands are high, more salt is carried away than was possible when the continents were young. This led scientists to believe that the average yearly deposit was less and the subsequent age of the seas much greater.

Another theory offered by geologists had the same fault. For example, the rivers of the United States carry 733 million tons of stone stuff (about 6 million cubic feet) into the ocean every year. Divide this by the area of the United States and you see that it takes about 10,000 years before an average of one foot of solid rock is worn away. The conclusion reached on this basis has the same fault as the "salt method," namely, the rate of wear lessens as lands grow lower and therefore the clock of erosion is no clock at all.

The most recent method which has been offered by scientists comes from physicists rather than geologists. The discovery of radium by the Curies was the inspiration. This curious element is extremely active, and by means of its radio-active nature produces helium and heat until it turns itself into lead. The explanation is quite simple. Each new radium atom shoots out 8 alpha particles, 6 electrons, and a little heat. The heat radiates away, the alpha particles annex electrons and become the element Helium, the atoms which are left behind become a special kind of lead which weighs less than the ordinary sort. These changes have been measured and are known to take place at a definite rate of speed. Particles are shot out just often enough to turn half the uranium in a sample rock into lead in 5 billion years. The ratio of the lead to the uranium, therefore, would determine the age of the rock. No rocks have been found in which half the uranium has turned to lead which means that no one has found a rock 5 billion years old. Rocks have been found in which the ratio is 0.292 to 1.00, or .292 of 5 billion, or 1,460,000,000 years old. Though they depend on an accurate specimen, the conclusions are reliable. However, they are only able to tell us the age of the rock near the Earth's surface. What lies beneath we do not know; perhaps we shall never know.

So you see that old Mother Earth has succeeded admirably in hiding her age from the probing minds of mankind. Though her daughters, our fair females, have taken the cue from her and still keep men guessing, they can still learn plenty from the old lady.

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READER'S PAGE

NOW HE KNOWS!

Sirs:

I am one of those persons who made fun of the ones who read FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and now that I've read it I realize what I've missed.

"The Return of Jongor" was good. I like Jongor as well as I do Tarzan and that's plenty. Try to get more of him. I agree with Manfred Baskin about a scientifiction book club. I wasn't going to, but then I figured if nobody wrote even though they wanted a book club there wouldn't be one, so I wrote and I sure hope you have one.

George Caldwell
1115 San Anselmo Ave.
San Anselmo, Calif.

It never does pay to ridicule anything without first considering whether or not it is deserving of ridicule. Even the veriest "nut" deserves a hearing. We've gotten a lot of fine stories by living up to that rule.—ED.

HE SHOULD KNOW!

Sirs:

I have been reading your mags for about a year now and find that for sheer entertainment and variety they cannot be beat. I can say this with authority because, to the best of my knowledge, I have read, at one time or another, every science-fiction mag now appearing.

I have just finished the April issue of FANTASTIC and I find that, although it is good, it is far inferior to the Feb. number. I will not try to list the titles in the order in which they rated as there was very little variation in quality. However, I do think that the Jongor story was the best and it's a shame it wasn't as good as the cover. The one by Cabot was the only deficit in this issue.

The suggestion by Manfred Baskin on the Reader's Page was one of the few sensible ones I've seen offered, and I am all for such a club. As an introductory offer why not give away a volume containing all the stories so far published about Lefty Feep, Juggernaut Jones, and a few other really good series characters? And if such a club is formed, let's see plenty of the three B's, Burroughs, Binder, and Bond. Also Weinbaum.

Wm. M. Carey, Jr.
115 William Street
Kearny, N. J.

We are glad to have your authoritative opinion on our magazines. As for the book club suggestion, we have received almost 100% favorable reply, and few letters neglect to mention it. If we can build up a sizeable list of potential members, perhaps this suggestion will be a must after the war.—ED.

A YERXA DEFENDER

Sirs:

I take it upon myself to explain something to one of the readers of F.A., (I will not put him in the class of normal readers of this mag by calling him a fan). George W. Hall in my estimation should not be allowed to buy F. A.

I'd like to tell Mr. Hall where to get off, calling Yerxa's stories immature, badly written, insincere and mediocre.

I've been reading F. A. for quite a long time now and whenever I see Mr. Yerxa's name on the table of contents I get a flip-flop feeling, for I know I'm in for some good reading.

M. J. Rosensky
1678 45 St.
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mr. Yerxa will love you!—ED.

A RADIO MAN CORRECTS

Sirs:

Re: "You Can Say That Again," December FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

First: The story was weak as fantasy, and certainly NOT scientifiction. Then:

A. The illustration was a bit incorrect: 1. Announcer is using popular CAPSULE type microphone, obviously. Announcer is speaking into DEAD end of mike. M-m-m, complicated. 2. Furtive figure in background could NOT have entered properly locked studio, when said studio was ON THE AIR, or RECORDING.

B. The write-up of the story was a bit unpalatable, in that: 1. An AMPLIFIER, (the author obviously meant AMPLIFIER) is NOT a receiver. 2. When recording, AMPLIFIER is switched on BEFORE time of use, to "warm up" —preparatory to proper reproduction of signal from mike. 3. For proper recording, announcer would NOT operate mike switch, until recording head, (cutting mechanism) had been placed on already turning disc. Such procedure requiring OPERATOR (Langley) to give ANNOUNCER

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Tightens False Teeth or No Cost!

JUST 3 STEPS Here's new amazing mouth comfort without risking a single cent . . . enjoy that feeling of having your own teeth again. Satisfy your desire for food . . . eat what you want. CROWN RELINER TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH OR NO COST. PERFECT FOR PARTIALS, LOWERS AND UPPERS.

Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply CROWN RELINER. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. No old-fashioned heating to burn your mouth. Just squeeze CROWN from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for CROWN RELINER to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with CROWN, take your false teeth out for cleaning without affecting the CROWN RELINER. CROWN RELINER is guaranteed it's harmless. NOT A POWDER OR PASTE! DOES NOT BURN OR IRRITATE. If not satisfied, even after 4 months, return partly used tube for full refund.

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You take no risk when you order Crown Plate Reliner. You must be 100% delighted or no cost. Try it for four months and return for a full refund if not satisfied. Order at once and we'll include free with your order a tube of Crown's Dental Plate Cleaner. You'll be delighted with both and the Crown Cleaner will always make your mouth feel clean and refreshed. Rush coupon sending name and address. Pay postman *one* dollar for combination plus postage or send cash and we pay postage. Act now and enjoy this new happiness.

Read This

J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked. Now I can eat steaks, corn on the cob." E. W. W. of Virginia writes: "I found Crown Reliner to be all you claim and more." . . . many more attest to *same excellent results.* Reline your plates with CROWN. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. Order a tube of CROWN RELINER today . . . enough to last a year. We include FREE a tube of CROWN plate cleaner.

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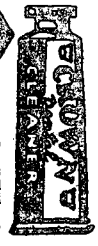

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(Reese) cue. 4. WAX discs are NOT used for broadcast. Processed recordings, transcriptions, occasional acetate and glass-acetate instantaneous recordings and SOME movie film sound track recording, and more recently, magnetic wire, but NEVER—WAX! 5. The MELLOW whiskey account plays a large part in the author's recountings. If memory serves me right, hard liquors are NOT commercially mentioned in radio advertising. (In accordance with National Association of Broadcasters' dictum of years standing.) 6. Reference to announcer's drunkenness, on the air, TABOO. (Federal Communications Commission.) 7. Of course, the veryUNprofessional touch given the commercial, is excusable. 8. Commercial copy (continuity) CANNOT be ad-libbed. Further, F.T.C. requires submission of all copy, one of every three months, for scrutiny by F.T.C. 9. The use of profanity is ILLEGAL. Langley's fingers would NOT have refused to touch the "key" had he been intelligent enough to know the least punishment for his friend, and in view of his own actions, himself, would be banishment from radio. (Getting the blackball, we call it.) With a great possibility of jail sentences. (F.C.C. regulations. Not more than ten years, or $10,000, or both.) 10. According to the story, on page 120—well—I can't take it. Such goings on are impossible! But first—the author apparently meant TRANSMITTER "PLANT"—when he said POWER STATION. Well, transmitters are (F.C.C. regulations) attended by engineers, who MUST monitor all transmissions. And such an attendant would surely cut the studio line, in event of such tampering. Further, if the network show were "piped" through the transmitter, how could an operator at the studio cut the net? Further yet, cutting the net, without authority, would amount to deliberate disruption of published broadcast schedule without cause, and, as such, would be punishable by law, as would be the vandalism of breaking and entering a radio station, under the surveillance of the Federal Government.

Now, after this partial list of the MOST GLARING discrepancies, I shall add but a few comments. Perhaps any radio man should consider it beneath his dignity, to remark on such an asinine opus. However, Mr. Irwin's effort is one of many such, in an ever-widening tide of incorrect, inaccurate, senseless ridicules of radio, by persons who, as the above corrections demonstrate, know damned little if ANYTHING about radio. Just looking through at a studio window, or into a control room exposed to the public, makes NOBODY capable of judging ANY part of the profession and artistic labors that require not only skill, but logic and common sense.

Well, that does it—except for one final, sincere word—I've been a fan of *Amazing* for years. And with this exception—I've found FANTASTIC easily taken. I'm no critic of writing, so this is the first criticism I've ever written. But certainly, you

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can sympathize with me, as the above subject is very close to my heart.

Ron Davis
(address withheld)

Both your author and your editor know a great deal more about radio than before. Thanks for your professional analysis of Mr. Irwin's story. —ED.

IF

Sirs:

I have noted, to my extreme dissatisfaction, that you have published quite a number of time-travel stories in your past few issues of AS and FA. Now I have no grudge or dislike that forces me to make the above statement. It is only the following few words:

TIME-TRAVEL IS IMPOSSIBLE!

Now, many fans may not accept this. I remember the turmoil caused when you published a letter by K. Bouvier, Jr. a few issues ago. But if any clear-headed person will take a few seconds out to think, he will find the above statement true. Now suppose that you went back in time to, for example, May 10th, 1942. You walk into your office and kill your 1942 self. What would happen? According to this statement above, you died on May 10th, 1942. Yet you were alive on that day, the day after it, and many years after that.

Here's another example for the six-year olds: What is to stop you from going back in time and prevent John Wilkes Booth from killing Lincoln?

I would appreciate it if you would publish this letter to enlighten your SO INTELLIGENT fans who have overlooked this fact for years.

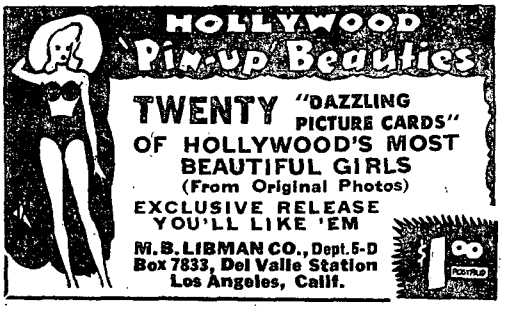
Arthur Oesterreicher
241 W. Olive St.
Long Beach, N. Y.

First, arguments anent time-travel enter into the metaphysical, and we all know that discussion has been deadlocked along logic lines there. Second, this magazine is predicated on one little word: "if." Our authors begin with this: "IF it is possible to travel in time, we instantly open up fascinating possibilities!" You yourself postulate a very interesting possibility for a story. What would happen if you prevented the assassination of Lincoln? There could be a very powerful and entertaining story here. The very fact that our fans are intelligent enough to admit the if into their imaginations, and to argue an abstract subject in metaphysics would seem to give a more than convincing reply to your closing inference. ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE, IF!—ED.

MORE ST. JOHN COMING!

Sirs:

How does St. John do it? My favorite artist paints about the best cover of his career. Oh what a cover! MAGNIFICENT! A painting fit for a king. And his interior illustrations! Mere words cannot describe their beauty. Would that



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I could draw half as good as he does. Of course I haven't had time to read "The Return of Jongor" yet, but it promises to be good.

While on the subject of St. John, I make another plea for more of his work. This time on the back cover. Have him create a series "Creatures of Prehistoric Days." Can't you just picture in your mind St. John's interpetation of a fight between two dinosaurs? Or the flight of a pterodactyl across the sunken marshlands? Even the early cave men battling a sabertooth tiger? I will bet my last penny it would prove the most popular of the back cover paintings you ever printed.

Lester Mayer, Jr.
592 Main Ave.
Passaic, New Jersey

Your wishes will come true. And your suggestion looks like a very good one to us. We will give it serious consideration.—ED.

BACK ISSUES

Sirs:

Just finished reading your February issue. Enjoyed it very much. They were all swell stories but I liked "Appointment with the Past" best. "Letter to the Editor" was very good.

I have been reading F.A. and A.S. for two years and have enjoyed every issue.

I have been writing science fiction stories in high school as themes and may get a good one to send in to you some time.

I would like to know if you know where I can get a few issues of 2 years back of either F.A. or A.S.? If you can find some please notify me.

Sure do hope you can get back on your regular schedule again.

Charley Johnson
Box 327
Fernley, Nev.

Page 207 carries a list of back copies still available. Each of our magazines will carry such a list each issue, as a regular feature, kept up to date.—ED.

HOW ABOUT THIS ISSUE?

Sirs:

This is the second letter I have written. I just could not help telling you that your mag. should come out every month. The waiting for it is terrible. To get back to discussions, your best artist is Finlay, I think. Your best writer is Nelson Bond. The story that made me buy every issue is "Stenton's Shadow." I liked that story in the June 1943 issue. Please listen, dear Editor, more fantastic stuff, less science and book novels. I don't mind spending a quarter for F.A., but I want more interesting stories.

Herby Bell
2195 East 22 St.
Brooklyn, N. Y.

If you want more fantasy, this issue should be the answer to your prayers!—ED.

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TWO REASONS FOR IT

Sirs:

I must say that although there are some faults to your mags, they are two of the best in science-fiction.

The war sure is cutting down on the number of stories in the latest issues. I just got hold of a 1942 issue the other day, and it listed 13 stories, while the April issue had only 7 stories. Oh, well, (sigh), the paper shortage can be blamed for that.

"The Return of Jongor" by Williams was a very good story, but the original, "Jongor of Lost Land" was even better. The rest of the issue is fairly good and I commend you upon doing such a good job under the conditions of wartime, what with many of the best authors in the service.

George R. Michel
2061 Watson Ave.
Bronx, New York

Yes, the paper shortage has removed 32 pages from our magazine; another reason is the demand for longer stories. This issue has eight stories, including one complete novel, which we think is pretty good.—ED.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE!

Sirs:

I certainly hope the war is over soon because there are hardly any SF mags left.

I have been reading SF for only three or four years but I feel as if I have read them all. I read my first SF mag in San Juan, Porto Rico. I had just gotten off of a Navy transport and was very bored because I was alone in the hotel. I bought the first reading matter I saw. I have read them ever since.

I did not think this month's mag was exceptional but it was all right. I rated them like this:

The Return of Jongor—3
Homer and the Herring—5
Time On Your Hands—4
Freddie Funk's Forgetful Elephant—3
A Horse on Thorndyke—1
Lefty Feep Does Time—2
The Curse of El Dorado—2

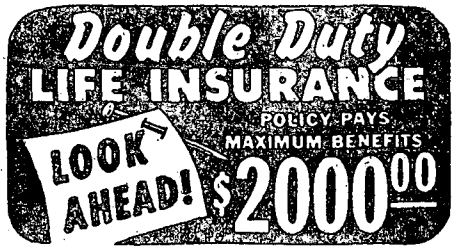
H. Love
The Bolles School
Jacksonville, Florida

Yes, it'll be a great day for science fiction when the war is over!—ED.

O'BRIEN HIT THE JACKPOT HERE

Sirs:

"The Place is Familiar" by D. W. O'Brien was very good. More!!!! "What's in a Name" by Berkeley Livingston was a little gem of a story. Was that "Letter to the Editor" story on the level? I, myself, don't think time travel is possible. "Outlaw Queen of Venus" by Wallace West and "The Musketeers in Paris" were both good. "A Thought in Time" and "Appointment with the Past" were fair. As for Lefty Feep, I think you and Bloch are running him into the ground. Once



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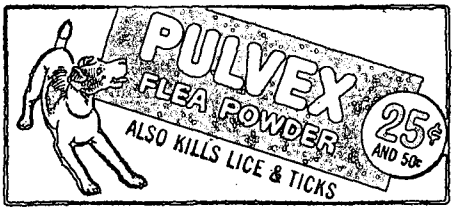

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every 3 or 4 issues is enough for me. He's beginning to get stale now. Please have more Wilcox and Ed. Hamilton, they're my favorite authors. Wishing you a good year in '44.

An Old Reader

Our prediction regarding O'Brien's yarn came true. It was easily one of the best stories of the year. Regarding "Letter To The Editor," here is the true story: Author Scott Feldman writes and admits it was a gag. He is the author of the story. But he ran into a fantastic angle even more incredible than the story (he says!) regarding that mysterious assailant who bopped your editor on the bean! That's why he was reluctant to confess once he had pulled the gag. Personally, we will bop him on the bean if ever we meet him. Somehow that story just doesn't jell. And after all, it will be some satisfaction at least to know that the mysterious bopper has been repaid if only by proxy! As for the plastic button, we have finally found its duplicate!—In the Dime Store! Ah well, it was a very popular little story, and all's well that ends well.—ED.

WHO GHOSTS THERE, FAMILIAR?

Sirs:

Having been for sometime a person who disagrees with everyone else, I have until now been satisfied with the way FANTASTIC and *Amazing* were conducting themselves, but it has gotten too bad for me to hold out longer.

In this present issue, the first story, "Outlaw Queen of Venus," should never have been published in FANTASTIC. In *Amazing, maybe,* but never in F.A. And the editorial comment on D. W. O'Brien's story, "The Place is Familiar." It says that Kerwin was indebted to the ghosts and paid them off by pointing the way out. He did not. He pointed the way out, but he wasn't indebted to them, and *they* paid *him* off. And did you have any vague reason for the name of the story, or did it just sound nice? It certainly didn't fit.

One of your letters mentions several classics which one doesn't see nowadays, or anything approaching them. You in turn give several which are according to you as good or better than these others. When these others were written, I didn't even read stf, but since then, I have read them, and the stories you mentioned, while extra good, are not nearly as good as those the critic mentions, in spite of letters. They are acclaimed as classics merely because, at the level to which stories have sunk, they are classics. But stick them with some of the older stories!

How about printing the date when the mag is supposed to be on the stand, and trying to have it there?

Please let's not have the back covers illustrating any of the stories, because I for one, and I think many others, keep these back color covers, and it is nice to have the articles to go with them, especially those about the stars.

The story about the fairy tales kinda hit home,

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because my friends have even taken to calling me "Fantastic and Weird," and if you don't believe it just write anybody around here. I am more or less proud of my imagination, but when everybody standing around laughs their damn fool heads off at you it's a little irksome.

It seems to me that the Camden NJ fan was right, in spite of any axiomatic laws. Just because these things happen to be so on Earth doesn't hold true on the planets . . . or does it?

I sincerely appreciate Mr. G. Foster's letter and his way of arguing even if I do disagree with him. More letters like this, please.

In answer to Carter's query "Why doesn't Smith use the same creature?" If he did, what would be the use of the series? It would be merely an old familiar with weapons, and maybe a new setting.

Gerry Trucano, Jr.
Box 1094
Dickinson, N. Dak.

Although West's story was interplanetary, it seemed to us to have fantastic elements placing it very strongly in this magazine. Kerwin was indebted to the ghosts, because they saved him from losing his wife. A "familiar" is a ghost that haunts a person or place. Thus, this "place" was haunted, therefore the title—which is the author's, and seemed fitting to us. We have found that, as a general rule, the stories which impressed us most years ago are a terrific disappointment when reread. Not true in all cases, of course, but recently we've had this brought home to us in reading hundreds of the old favorites. Some, to be quite frank, are pure corn, amateurish, even badly done —and highly unimaginative. Dates, nowadays, are like time-travel; they depend on an if, and it's a big if. We couldn't live up to the date if we did publish it. Transportation priorities you know.—ED.

ARTIST VERSUS MAGICIAN

Sirs:

Have just finished reading the February issue and I wonder if the artist who painted the back cover scene from "Appointment With the Past" read the story. According to the story, "Oriental" was very solid and the two men were kidnaped in the night, not in daylight. Just the same I always look forward to an issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, as a whole it's a magazine that is to my taste.

Dallas Daniel
R.F.D. No. 1
LaGrange, Georgia

Have you ever seen a movie night scene? It doesn't fool you very much, does it? Yet, it can be done. But it's not real. Actually, the scene is taken in brilliant daylight, and the camera and film do the rest. However, an artist is not the magician a camera can be, so picture for yourself how the artist would have painted a transparent ship in a night scene? Yes, our decision was the

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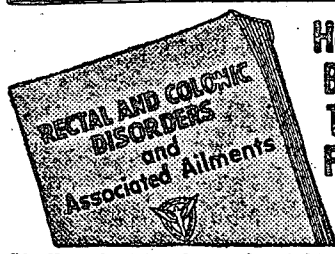

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same as yours—let him paint it in daylight; the readers will forgive him this little point. Besides, it was a swell painting.—ED.

NOT INCLUDING AMERICANISM!

Sirs:

Some months ago you expressed disapproval as to the everlastingly nauseating letters you would receive which would produce a thoroughly uninteresting rating and would close with either a corny anecdote or some senseless innuendo that would benefit none but themselves. I can readily understand your impatience with such, and I hope this will be more like what you've been asking for.

Now, it may seem rather unbelievable, but science-fiction and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES have, much contrary to the way it usually is, saved my honor and prestige among my friends. You see, before I had even heard stf and fantasy were in existence, I was one of the many that allowed themselves to be sunk in the quicksand of isms. When I was attracted to a magazine called *Amazing Stories*, which I immediately took up with, as well as its sister mag, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, the truth came to me how undemocratic isms are, how unlike the way of life we Americans are used to living. All thanks go to you, of course, and my appreciation is indeed intense.

Now a few words about your super February issue of FA. (Via Harry Warner's excellent method of rating.)

Cover: Although Rod Ruth isn't half as good in color as he is in a black-and-white medium, he did a beautiful job of depiction. Congrats on his first *good* painting, and 8½ points.

Back cover: Settles is a good man to have. Don't lose him—just look at the beautiful work he did on those life-savers, and partially in water color too! Tho, I must say you certainly fizzled out on that "series" you started a while back. Don't get me wrong now, the drawings were swell, but your proposed sequence (Ah, for a synonym) petered out, N'est-ce pas? 8 pts.

Stories: The outstanding three were "Outlaw Queen of Venus," "The Musketeers in Paris" and (believe it or not) "A Letter to the Editor." Robert Bloch has become almost mediocre with his quaint little character. Overdone, rather, let him drop Feep for awhile and create an equally entertaining character to fill in. What do you think about it? Good Lord, how could you possibly call Yerxa's "story" worthy of merit? Pshaw, nothing but a cheap little tale not possibly or remotely connected with true stf. No, methinx you're still buying his yarns because of his four kids. Oh, yes, not very much chance of using the Warner rating system here, so will only say the first three mentioned were tops, and especial thanx for ?'s "Letter to the Editor." T'was really a unique idea.

Illustrations: Finlay and McCauley cop first honors, each *glomming* a 9. It's too bad Finlay's intricacy can't be as finely reproduced on pulp as

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on slick. St. John wasn't too bad, but his German looked more like the mortgage-holding villian of yore, greedily eyeing the beautiful damsel. Wish Magarian would make up her mind as to how Lefty Feep looks.

The ish as a whole was far better than its preceding four, an' I hope you can keep up the tempo. I'd like to see more of Rod Ruth on the interiors, if you can get time.

David H. White
1501 N. Broadway Ave.
Everett, Washington

We are glad to see that our magazines seem to be convincingly democratic in principle. We try not to be political in our stories or our editorial notes. This is a fiction magazine, and the characters in its fiction are Americans, good and true. We mistakenly credited Rod Ruth with the cover of the February issue. Robert Gibson Jones, aided by Julian S. Krupa and Malcolm Smith, is responsible. Our "series" is still going on, but we vary it with other "series".—ED.

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

THIS feature will be discontinued for the duration in the interests of the safety of our armed forces and of national security.

BACK ISSUES CORNER

Each issue we will publish the following list of copies of back issues of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES still available. They can be secured by addressing the Circulation Department. Cost of all issues more than six months from date of this issue is 30c; less than six months previous 25c.

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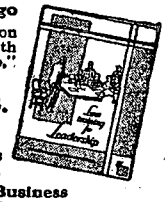

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BELLEROPHON AND THE CHIMERA

By MORRIS J. STEELE

Because a King set traps to kill him, this Greek became one of the greatest legendary heroes of ancient time

BELLEROPHON, or Bellerophontes, was the son of Glaucus, and the grandson of Sisyphus, who was one of the great men of ancient Ephyre, or modern Corinth.

When Anteia, wife of Proteus, King of Argos, fell in love with him, she made overtures which were rejected by Bellerophon. True to the tradition of "a woman spurned" she sought revenge; and true to the "Potiphar's wife" theme, she accused him to her husband.

Proteus thereupon sent Bellerophon to his father-in-law, Iobates, King of Lycia, bearing a note which directed Iobates to have him killed.

However, previous to this event, Bellerophon had succeeded in taming the winged horse, Pegasus, at Corinth, and thus rode the animal to Lycia.

Arriving there, the King sent him in a suicidal mission against the Chimera, which was a fire-breathing monster, part goat, part serpent, part lion. In a thrilling battle, mounted on Pegasus, Bellerophon succeeded in killing the Chimera.

Iobates was not baffled for long. He promptly sent Bellerophon against a warlike tribe, the Solymi. Bellerophon adminstered the whole tribe a resounding whipping and returned triumphant, eager for more battles.

Obligingly Iobates sent him against the Amazons, who, in addition to being fearsome warriors, were also women. Nothing daunted, Bellerophon forgot his gentlemanly instincts long enough to cuff them around in unmerciful fashion, emerging the victor over very potent muscles and nonexistent feminine charm. (It has been said that the Amazons amputated their right breast to avoid obstruction of the strings of their mighty bows.)

Irked by his constant failures to execute the doughty young warrior, Iobates selected a group of his own chosen warriors and laid an ambush for the youth. It was to be outright murder. It turned out to be a form of murder, all right, but Bellerophon did the murdering. He waded through the ambushers with great gusto and came up yelling for more.

There was only one thing for Iobates to do; he recognized the fact that Bellerophon was more than human, and capitalized on the realization by marrying his daughter to him.

A lot of money must have gone with the deal, and the reason for it might be apparent when we consider that legend says nothing about the daughter's looks; which in legend means she hadn't any—at any rate, Bellerophon lived in prosperity for several years.

It is said the gods love battle—especially if someone else is doing the battling; which may be the reason that Bellerophon finally fell out of favor with them. Two of his children died, and Bellerophon was grief-stricken. He became a wanderer, shunning mankind.

One version of legend gives a more definite reason for Bellerophon's simpleton-like visit to Lycia bearing a note directing his own destruction. It seems he was fleeing from the consequences of slaying the Corinthian hero, Bellerus, or his own brother, as some accounts have it.

That Bellerophon recognized the fact that someone was after his scalp is revealed by his subsequent visit to Proteus to take Anteia for what may have been the first "ride." He took her on the winged horse, Pegasus, to a great height and revenged himself by the simple expedient of dropping her off and telling her to walk back.

It might have been the effects of his sudden affluence after his marriage to the daughter of Iobates that caused his falling into disfavor with the gods. It is said that men with nothing to occupy their time, and too much money, get into mischief by thinking up things to do that are a little too ambitious. Bellerophon, having a winged horse, hit on the idea of flying to heaven. We can understand why the gods objected.

They caused him to fall from his horse. Perhaps this is the best proof of his innate toughness, because the fall only lamed him, in spite of the fact that he bailed out without a parachute.

Bellerophon, according to accounts of the details of his first amazing feat, the taming of Pegasus, accomplished the trick by means of a special bridle given him by the goddess, Athena.

Although Bellerophon is considered to be a strictly Greek hero, he was actually stolen by the Greek mythologists from an Oriental beginning. Little is known of his exploits as an Oriental hero, although they must have been considerable, or he would not have been adopted by the publicity-loving Greeks.

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READER'S PRIZE CORNER

EACH issue, until further notice, this magazine will pay $10.00 for the best letter of not more than 100 words stating simply what you like best about *Fantastic Adventures*, and what you like least. Such criticism may include suggestions for changes. Winner will be announced in the issue immediately following. The decision of the editors of this magazine will be final. In case of ties, the award will be made on the basis of neatness and clarity of presentation. Closing date will be the 20th of the month preceding the date of this issue. Each letter should be accompanied by listing, in order of preference, of the stories in this issue (coupon below may be used, or a reasonable facsimile). Only stories read need be listed.

EDITORS, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES
540 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago 11, Ill.

Sirs:

I rank the stories in the June, 1944, issue as follows: (Indicate preference by numbering 1 to 8 in squares. Mark X for stories not read.)

- THE STRANGE MISSION OF ARTHUR PENDRAN ☐
- THE MAN WHO LOST HIS SHADOW ☐
- THE TRUTHFUL PENCIL ☐
- HITLER'S RIGHT EYE ☐
- MAN FROM THE MAGIC RIVER ☐
- BURY ME DEEP ☐
- HORN O' PLENTY ☐
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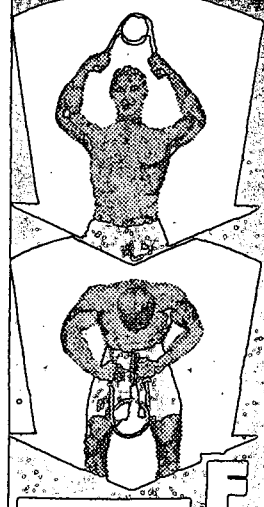

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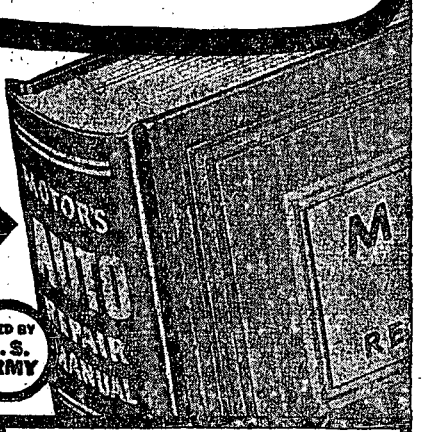

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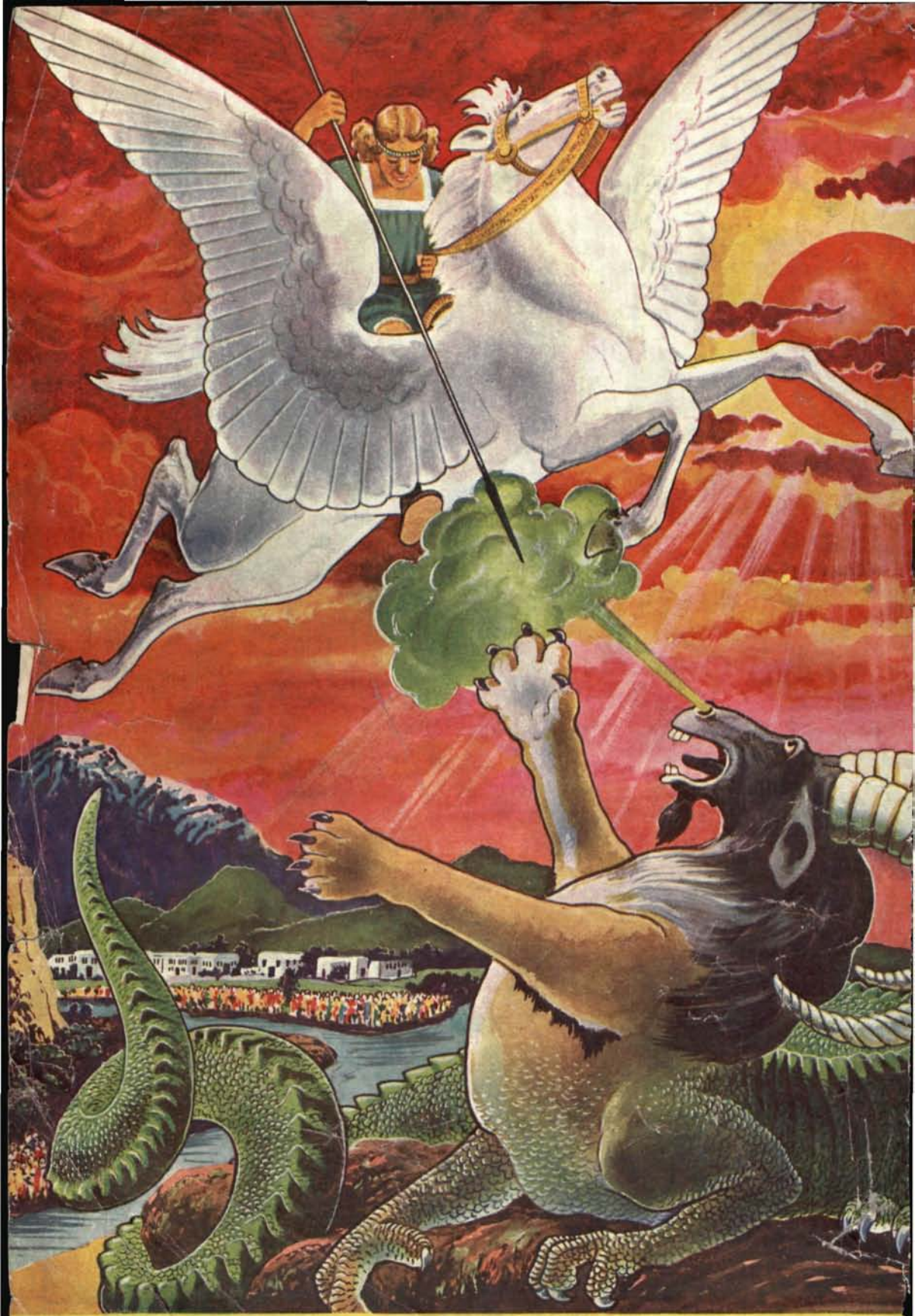

BELLEROPHON and the CHIME

This [illegible] hero slew the Chimera and perished in the [illegible]

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